

LETTERS

ON

THE STUDY AND USE OF

ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY:

CONTAINING

OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THOSE EVENTS WHICH HAVE PRODUCED
CONSPICUOUS CHANGES IN THE

ASPECT OF THE WORLD,

AND

THE GENERAL STATE OF HUMAN AFFAIRS.

BY JOHN BIGLAND,

AUTHOR OF,

"A Geographical and Historical View of the World," — *"Letters on
the Political State of Europe,"* — *"Letters on Natural
History,"* &c. &c.

.....Her ample Page
Rich with the spoils of Time.

GRAY.

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1810.

Respecting the First Edition of this Work, the Reviewers make the following mention:

After pointing out the requisite qualifications for the reader of history, the Monthly Review for June 1804, thus proceeds:—"It is in this account that we consider a judicious survey of the history of the world, if it point out the principal outlines which merit the student's attention, and be also accompanied with remarks of such a nature as we have described above, as a very useful and valuable acquisition; and it gives us great pleasure to observe, that this desirable end is very successfully promoted in the collection of letters now before us."

"Mr. Bigland displays in this volume a well-cultivated and comprehensive mind. His style is generally correct though not highly polished; his information is extensive; and the many pertinent remarks and inferences, with which he has enriched this summary of general history, meet our cordial approbation."

"The letters are twenty-three in number; and although some of them are of considerable length, the reader will find no occasion to make that circumstance a subject of complaint. A copious list of the contents of each is prefixed to the work, and will prove an useful remembrancer after the perusal of a letter; serving not only to imprint the reflections on the reader's mind, but as a clue to guide him to the consideration of the subject in a more ample manner at his own leisure."

The reviewer then goes into length with some of the most interesting extracts, and concludes thus:—

"What enlightened mind will not heartily concur in these just and liberal reflections! If our limits permitted, we could with pleasure proceed to state the Author's view of America, and the probable effects which the discovery of that new world may ultimately produce: but it is time for us to close our remarks, together with the interesting volume which has excited them."

"We are well pleased with this publication, which, founded on the authority of the most celebrated historians, exhibits a very useful manual for the younger student. It is written with great vigour and perspicuity: nor do we see any sentiment is obtruded, against which, as they relate either to religion or politics, it appears necessary to caution the young reader. It is an useful undertaking, well executed."

British Critic, July 1804.

"This little historic digest, collected from most unexceptionable authors, is executed with great neatness and propriety. The divisions, or "periods," are clear and discriminated. The different historic details are distinct and perspicuous; the reflections just and appropriate. On the whole, the letters claim our approbation."

Critical Review, July 1804.

THE AUTHOR'S

ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC.

THE favourable reception given to this work in the rapid sale of large impressions, has induced the author to avail himself of the opportunity afforded by the present edition, diligently to examine, and carefully to correct it; and he flatters himself it will be found more worthy of public approbation. It is with peculiar satisfaction he acknowledges the encouragement he has met with, in his design to render the study of Universal History more easy of access and familiar to the generality of readers; and presumes, from respectable testimonies in favour of his work, and its extensive circulation, that it may be the means of introducing this important subject to the acquaintance of many, whose circumstances have hitherto deprived them of the advantage of obtaining (on account of the expence and labour in perusing) more extensive works of a similar nature.

J. B.

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LETTERS

ON

HISTORY

LETTER I.

SIR,

IN compliance with your request, I take the liberty of laying before you a few remarks on the use and importance of an acquaintance with history, accompanied with some reflections on the manner in which it ought to be read, so as to render it an instructive and entertaining fund of general information.

The bent of your genius seems to lead you to the study of history. You wish to acquire a general knowledge of mankind, and historical reading is the only effectual means of obtaining it. In order to render you such assistance as the mediocrity of my abilities enables me, I here present you with some reflections and observations on the causes and consequences of the most remarkable events in the history of the world ; with an attempt to delineate the general condition of mankind, in each remarkable period.

Curiosity is inherent in man ; and, in some measure, accompanies every degree of the human understanding, and every modification of the mind. From the philosopher to the peasant, scarcely any

one is found who is not desirous of information on one subject or another ; but this curiosity is directed to different objects, in different minds, in proportion to their degrees of elevation, or the extent of their previous improvements. That Colossus of literature and moral philosophy, Dr. Johnson, says, "Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect." (Ramb. vol. 2. p. 267 ;) and again, (vol. 3. p. 252) "Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last ; and, perhaps, always predominates in proportion to the strength of the mental-faculties." These are the encomiums which that great observer of the human mind bestows on this passion ; but with all deference to so respectable an authority, the praise is, perhaps, rather due to the direction it takes, than to the passion itself ; for curiosity may be directed to the most insignificant as well as the most important objects. The uncultivated peasant confines his enquiries to the affairs of his own parish, while the man of a more improved understanding, and more extensive views, directs his attention to the affairs of the world at large, and is desirous of information relative to subjects which interest mankind in general ; the schemes of politicians, the stratagems of war, the fluctuations of commerce, and the progress of arts, sciences, or literature. This active curiosity of man may be gratified in many different ways ; but no gratification can

ever satisfy it. The traveller, who goes to view a strange country, on ascending every eminence, amuses his mind in the expectation of the prospect he shall enjoy from the summit; but, on gaining his point, his curiosity is so far from being extinguished by gratification, that it operates with redoubled force, and excites his desires to contemplate the landscapes which lie beyond his view; and which, he expects, will yet diversify the scene, and amuse him in his farther progress. In like manner, the man of a cultivated understanding, while he investigates the wonders of art, or the phenomena of nature, finds his curiosity continually excited by new objects; and the village gossip, who turns her thoughts to nothing farther than the domestic concerns of her neighbours, finds her curiosity as strongly and incessantly excited by the whispers of scandal, and the trifling concerns of the neighbourhood, as does the philosopher who directs his attention to the most important and interesting phenomena of the physical, moral, or intellectual world. a

Since then curiosity is a passion inherent in the human mind, in every situation, from the gilded palace to the mud-walled cottage, and operates with incessant activity upon every degree of the human understanding, it is an object of great utility and importance, in the right ordering of the mind, to direct the operation of so active a quality to such subjects of enquiry as

may be conducive to real improvement, and lead us to the knowledge of mankind, that vast society, of which every individual is a member. To acquire this knowledge, we must have recourse to reading. The mind is nourished, improved, and carried forward to the perfection of its nature, by reading and instruction. The human understanding is a blank, which may be filled up with various kinds of matter; and whatever degree of genius a man may naturally possess, he must be indebted to reading and reflection for his subsequent improvement. For want of this, many Platos, Aristotles, and Ciceros, many Lockes and Newtons, are following the plough.

Reading and conversation are the two great vehicles of information; but unless the former be cultivated, the latter will be uninformative. The man who has not improved his mind by reading, will not be able to instruct in conversation, or to derive much instruction by that channel. It has been often, and justly remarked, that reading alone is not sufficient to give a complete knowledge of mankind. In allowing the justness of this observation, we must, however, consider that reading is the basis of all intellectual acquirements, and instructs us in the theory, as the incidents of real life and conversation with man teach us the practical part of what is called the knowledge of the world, or of mankind.

In order to attain this kind of knowledge, history is more requisite than any other kind of reading.

and beyond comparison more effectually conducive to that end. Books are composed to suit the capacities and inclinations of every description of readers; but we may, without hesitation, give the preference to historical reading, as a vehicle of general information, when the term is understood in the full extent of its signification; for, as Cicero says, our education begins at the cradle, and ends only at the grave; comprehending the various kinds of information which the mind imbibes through life, by all the means of acquiring knowledge; so we may include, under the general denomination of history, every kind of knowledge we receive relative to matter of fact; and facts are the only means we possess of investigating the motives of human conduct, and of acquiring a knowledge of mankind.

Poetry is adapted to amuse the fancy, to exalt the imagination, and to remove the passions, rather than to inform the understanding. The poet creates, in his own mind, and endeavours to form in the minds of his readers, an ideal world, often very different from the real world. His characters and descriptions are fictitious. And Romance, like poetry, is only an effusion of the imagination. It paints, in glowing colours, the performances, the sufferings, or the successes of imaginary heroes. History, on the contrary, relates the actions of men who have really existed, and shews what they have suffered, and what they have done. Romance describes men such

as they might, or ought to have been : History represents them such as they really are or have been. The former, like poetry, paints from fancy : the latter draws from nature.

History is the exhibition of man, the display of human life, and the foundation of general knowledge. It expands the ideas, enlarges the mind, and eradicates those narrow and illiberal prejudices which dim and corrupt the understanding. By developing the causes which influence and direct the opinions and conduct of men, in different ages, in different countries, in different situations of life, and under different political and religious establishments, it tends to inspire liberality of sentiment with a spirit of toleration and universal benevolence.

While we contemplate the various phenomena of the moral world, and the infinitely diversified and complicated scenes of human action, history exhibits, in successive order, as in a moving picture, all the generations of men. It displays the effects of political and religious systems, on nations and on individuals, and shews the rise and fall of empires, kingdoms, and states, with the causes of their prosperity and decline. In perusing the history of nations, we have an opportunity of investigating the circumstances which gave rise to their existence, procured their aggrandizement, precipitated them from their elevation, or effected their final subversion. Unhappily the annals of every country develope such a tissue of fraud and violence, such a series of

wars, battles, treasons, and stratagems, that some have denominated history a catalogue of the crimes and miseries of mankind. These things, however, are not unworthy of attention, as they shew in what manner the human passions operate in different situations and circumstances of life, and the consequences of their operation, the extreme instability of all sublunary things, and the uncertain nature of all human expectation; but they are far from constituting the most pleasing or valuable part of historical information. The most rational entertainment, as well as the most solid instruction, afforded by the study of history, arises from the opportunity it gives of contemplating the gradual improvement of the human mind, the origin, progress, and influence of arts and sciences, literature and commerce, of systems and opinions, the general state of mankind in different ages, and in different countries, and the progressive advancement of man, from a savage life in woods and wildernesses, to the highest pitch of learning and civilization, displayed in cities, colleges, courts, and senates. These are subjects which furnish an inexhaustible fund of rational entertainment and interesting information to an enquiring and philosophical mind; and, on this account, every reader of history ought, in a particular manner, to remark those important events which form an epoch in human affairs, which operate a lasting change in the condition of mankind, and from which a new order of things appears to have originated. These

USE OF HISTORY.

important and interesting events ought to be observed with a penetrating eye, and their causes and consequences examined with accurate investigation. By studying history in this manner, a wide field will open itself to our observation. We shall see how men, stimulated by necessity, first invented the arts most necessary to their comfort and well being; how, from the arts of necessity, they advanced to those of convenience, and gradually proceeded to the embellishments of luxury; advancing by progressive degrees of refinement, from the fig-leaf apron to the purple robe and embroidered cloak. A penetrating mind will discover the effects which those arts of necessity, convenience, and luxury, have produced on the condition of the human species, by giving rise to commerce, and to all that endless variety of employments which are so closely connected as to be essentially and reciprocally necessary to each other; and which contribute not a little to cement the fabric of civil society, by rendering men mutually dependent on one another. We shall observe, that men, as soon as they began to settle and multiply, discovered the necessity of uniting in societies, of ascertaining the divisions, and securing the possession of property; of establishing a regular subordination in society, of restraining the operation of inordinate desires by salutary laws, and of submitting themselves to a regular form of government; and we shall see how those governments, established for

the general good, soon degenerated into tyranny; and how, by continual encroachments, wars and conquests, one swallowing up another, numbers of them being united, formed powerful and extensive empires.

If historians, especially those of ancient times, had given to those interesting particulars all the attention which they might have done, instead of filling their volumes with little else than narratives of wars, battles, sieges, assassinations, usurpations, and massacres, we might have had a far more accurate and interesting history of the human mind than we can at present boast of, or hope ever to collect: but unfortunately the ancient historians have neglected to investigate those important subjects, while they have detailed the annals of slaughter and desolation with the minutest accuracy; as if they thought scenes of murder and bloodshed the only subjects worthy the attention of mankind, and the only things that could give pleasure to their readers. If they had diversified their blood-stained pages with colours of a milder hue, with curious delineations of commercial, scientific, and literary improvements, history would be far more instructive, more interesting, and more delightful.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

YOU know it has been observed by many good judges of human nature, and even asserted by

some who were qualified to speak experimentally on the subject, that the reading of history has a powerful tendency to excite martial ideas, and to determine youthful and inexperienced minds to a military life. It is related by some historians, that when the Goths had been converted to Christianity, and had the sacred scriptures translated into their language, it was thought advisable to omit, in that translation, the books of the Kings and the Chronicles, on account of the frequent relations of war and slaughter, lest the perusal of such narratives should stimulate their warlike and savage minds to deeds of violence, to which they were naturally so inclined; and lest, by a fatal mistake, they should think that war, conquest, and rapine, were sanctioned by the religion they had embraced. If this be true, it clearly shews the opinion which the enlightened men of that age had of the influence which narratives of military achievements have on ignorant and untutored minds. This influence, however, is founded not solely on the plan of narration which historians have so generally adopted; but is, in a great measure, derived from the misconception of readers, or their want of reflection.

The minds of youth may, indeed, easily be misled by that indiscriminate and unqualified praise too often given to those whose military talents have proved successful in the field; even sometimes when those talents, or those successes,

have been employed to enable them to usurp thrones to which they had no title, or to extend their conquests over countries where they could claim no right of sovereignty. But, the reader must consider himself accountable for his own error, if he suffer himself to imbibe romantic ideas, or form erroneous conclusions, for want of making just and appropriate reflections on the actions and events of human life and their consequences. A little reflection would not only give him a clear view of the crimes of many of the great characters of history, but also convince him of the extreme uncertainty of military honors.

We must allow, in its fullest extent, the intrinsic value and indisputable respectability of military talents, when rightly employed: it is the abuse alone of them that is condemnable. The military station is, and ought to be, honourable; but the necessity of its existence is a moral evil; and to delight in war, is criminal. True courage consists in resisting misfortune or aggression as much and as long as possible; and if further resistance be found impossible, in bearing adversity with a noble magnanimity, and suffering with a steady and unshaken fortitude; but an inclination to inflict evil on others is not a characteristic of true courage, but of savage ferocity. We cannot too highly honour those, who, when called out to the defence of their country, distinguish themselves by their courage

and conduct in the field. Military skill, and undaunted presence of mind, amidst the horrors and dangers of war, united with an invariable love of peace, characterize the true hero ; while a sanguinary delight in war and bloodshed is the unequivocal mark of a barbarian, and consistent only with the character of an Attila, a Bajazet, or a Tamerlane.

If those who delight to peruse the history of military achievements, understood, or would consider the nature of war, they would perceive upon what an infinite variety of unforeseen and seemingly trivial accidents the success of a campaign, or a military expedition depends ; and discover that the combined exertions of a multitude of subordinate warriors, from the chief of a division, to the private soldier, must contribute to the success of the action, and the glory of the commander.

If we make a just estimation of human actions, we shall find that the greatest part of the heroes of history merited the name of robbers and murderers rather than the title of conquerors : but the folly of mankind too often loads, with pompous applause, those characters which are worthy of their detestation, and, instead of holding any place in the remembrance of posterity, should

“ Rest forgot with mighty tyrants gone,

“ Their statues mouldered, and their names unknown.”

We shrink with horror at the idea of the

human sacrifices offered by the Phœnicians, the Carthaginians, and some other nations of antiquity; by the Mexicans, not above three centuries ago; and even at this day by several nations dispersed over the islands of the Pacific Ocean, and recently discovered by our modern circumnavigators; and we cannot but look with a mixture of pity, contempt, and abhorrence, on the people who offer those horrid oblations. By what strange delusion then does it happen, that when we see a man, on the altar of whose ambition and avarice more human victims have been immolated, perhaps in one day, than any of the above-mentioned nations sacrificed in half a century; by what strange delusion, I say, does it happen, that we can willingly fall down and worship the blood-besmeared idol? If, indeed, the hero had, by the prowess of his single arm, hewn down the ranks of the enemy, and laid his thousands and his tens of thousands in the dust, we might, perhaps, revere him as a superior, although a malevolent being, and through the terror of his name fall down before the great destroyer. But, alas! we see in the mighty Conqueror no more than a man, weak and infirm like ourselves, who, in personal strength and courage, is perhaps inferior to several private soldiers in the ranks of his own and the enemy's armies, and possesses no natural endowment of body or mind, by which he could, in equal circumstances, distinguish himself above many individuals among the unnoticed multitude which follow his standard.

If the writers of history have dazzled the eyes of posterity, by painting in brilliant colours the achievements of the celebrated destroyers of mankind, their readers often mislead themselves by not reflecting on the concomitant circumstances of actions and events. In reading the exploits of an Alexander, a Scipio, a Hannibal, or a Cæsar, or of other more modern warriors, we follow the chief with an attentive eye, we admire his martial abilities, and feel ourselves interested in his fate, without so much as bestowing a thought on the nameless multitude of vulgar warriors falling by his side, or once reflecting on the numerous victims which are sacrificed, before the glittering idol is placed on the altar of fame. If every one, whose mind is fired with military enthusiasm, could promise himself the attainment of all the fame and glory he could desire, ambition would admit of some excuse; but those who wish to obtain a name by the desolation of the world, and the destruction of their fellow-creatures, would do well to consider, that glory and fame cannot be the portion of all; and that in the Roman legions there was but one Cæsar, and only one Alexander, in the army which conquered Persia. Of all the subordinate officers who served under these and other celebrated conquerors, how few are enrolled in the annals of military glory! How few of their names have been transmitted to posterity! Although, without doubt, many of

those secondary heroes were equal both in skill and courage to the commander in chief. The commanders of detachments and divisions, although the success of the general plan of operations depends, in a principal degree, upon their abilities, seldom are fortunate enough to have their names noticed by posterity, while that of the general stands high in the annals of the age. The eyes of mankind are always fixed on the commander in chief. Although Cæsar, in his commentaries, is not backward in acknowledging the merit, and relating the actions of his officers, we know very little of their character or their abilities. Much of the perils and fatigues of the Gallic war was their's; the glory of the conquest is all his own. The great commanders, who served under Alexander, although they were men of consummate military abilities, soldiers of approved skill and courage, trained to arms under the warlike banners, and instructed by the lessons of his father Philip, would scarcely have been heard of by posterity, had they not reaped on, and divided among themselves, the spoils of their victorious master, exterminated his family, brought each other's grey hairs in blood to the grave, and rendered themselves still more conspicuous by their crimes than by their political and military abilities.

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If we studied history in a philosophical manner, we should, in reading the history of a campaign, instead of having our attention wholly

fixed on the fate of the general, contemplate also the hardships undergone by the brave soldiers who compose his army, and to whose valour and exertions he stands indebted for his success and his glory. If we considered the nameless and numberless multitudes of warriors who fall, not only by the sword, but by sickness, famine, and fatigue, the inseparable concomitants of war, and sink into the grave undistinguished and unknown, we should be enabled to make a more exact estimate of the horrors of war, and should easily and clearly perceive, that those brilliant exploits which shine with such a dazzling lustre in the pages of history, although they may be no more than amusing comedies to those who read or hear them at a distance, are real tragedies to a very great number of the actors who are concerned in them, as well as to thousands of others, who are involved in their consequences.

If history were studied as it ought, the most tragical relations which disfigure its ensanguined pages might be made conducive to our instruction, and subservient to our rational amusement. If we did but reflect on the tears of the widows and orphans, and imagine ourselves to hear the groans of the wounded and dying; if we represented to ourselves the splendid and warlike appearance of an army, at its first taking, the field, contrasted with the distressful spectacle of its shattered remains, after a hard fought

battle, or a bloody campaign, we should be thunderstruck at the reflection, and contemplate with horror the dreadful effects of the human passions. A mind well organized, would, from such considerations, derive both instruction and entertainment; an entertainment, tragical indeed; but which, by exciting emotions of pity, gives pleasure to the feeling and compassionate mind.

To derive instruction and pleasure from history, the reader must examine, reflect, and compare; and must likewise possess a feeling heart. The man who cannot feel another's woe, who cannot be affected with emotions of pity in contemplating the misfortunes of his fellow mortals, who cannot place himself in their situation, and consider in what manner he should have thought, felt, and acted, in the same circumstances, does not possess a frame of mind adapted to the study of history, such at least as we have of it; for, in the manner in which all ancient, and the greatest part of modern history is written, almost every page contains a tragedy.

When you have pondered these reflections in your mind, and examined their justness and propriety, I doubt not but they will meet with your approbation. In the mean while, a more agreeable field of speculation is ready to open itself to our view. At present I shall conclude, with assuring you, that, with every sentiment of respect and esteem,

I am, dear Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

A CURIOUS and interesting subject of speculation now presents itself to our view, in which a judicious perusal of history eminently contributes to develope the nature of the human mind, and to rectify our ideas and opinions.

While the philosopher contemplates the almost endless variety of political and religious establishments, existing in the world, and the current opinions of mankind in different ages, and in different countries, history, in an eminent degree, comes to his aid; and by enlarging his views, and extending his ideas, extinguishes those illiberal prejudices which narrow the mind, which deaden the feelings, and obscure the understanding. Error and prejudice have an almost universal influence over the minds of men; and it is only in proportion to the light conveyed to the mind, by general information and extensive views of things, that this influence is weakened or annihilated. Certain prepossessions take hold of our minds, and domineer over our reason, from our infancy, from the first dawn of thought. They are inspired by systems and establishments, by received customs, by current opinions and by the conversation and the authority of those who are the nearest and dearest to us, and have the greatest influence over us. Every nation, every

religious sect, every class of society, has prejudices peculiar to itself: these prejudices are strengthened by various circumstances; they acquire a deeper root from the books we read, the country we live in, the persons with whom we converse, the station of life in which we are placed, and a thousand other incidents. If we should select a certain number of children, of capacities as nearly equal as possible, (for a perfect equality in this respect does not exist) if we should give them all the same education, and place them in the same station of life, whatever trifling difference might be observed in their understandings or acquirements owing to the different degrees of their application and intellectual exertion, or other incidental circumstances, we should still find in all of them (more or less) the same views, the same prejudices, the same current opinions and general ideas. But if, on the contrary, they should be differently educated and disposed of—if one should be made a soldier—another a sailor,—the third an husbandman—the fourth a merchant—if another should be placed in a monastery, and enter into one of the religious orders of the church of Rome—another become a minister of some protestant church—if another should be sent into a Mahometan country, and, after a suitable education, become a mufti of the mussulman religion—if another should be educated among the Bramins of India—and the mind of another be formed

among the Lamas of Thibettian Tartary, or among the disciples of Confucius, or the worshippers of Foe, in China or Japan, we should then see in their different prejudices, current opinions, and general ideas, the full force and influence of external and adventitious circumstances upon the human intellect. If the minds of men could be rendered visible, what different pictures would those persons, in their maturer years, display ! They would exhibit, in the most luminous, the most distinct, and the most striking point of view, the full power and effect of national, political, and religious prejudices of the human mind. These prejudices, diversified by a thousand different shades, some more faintly, others more strongly marked, influence, in a greater or less degree, almost every individual of the human race ; but more especially the vulgar and illiterate, the slaves of systems, opinions, and fashions ; and their influence is hostile to the improvement of the human mind, as well as to true religion and christian charity. They foster ignorance and engender pride, and strongly tend to weaken or destroy that universal philanthropy so forcibly inculcated by the great Author of the Christian religion.

Nothing has a greater tendency to eradicate narrow and illiberal prejudices than a general acquaintance with those circumstances and events, which, at different periods, have taken place in the world, and which have, in so decisive a

manner, determined the condition and opinions of mankind; and this knowledge the judicious perusal of ancient and modern history communicates. Hence arise extensive views and just ideas, with which the spirit of persecution and intolerance is incompatible. While the bigotted Protestant condemns, perhaps, without examination, what he calls the absurdities of the church of Rome; and the bigotted Catholic anathematizes the Protestant who refuses obedience to what the other deems the infallible church; while the Calvinist condemns the Arminian, and the Arminian the Calvinist, because they happen to think differently respecting the mysterious plan of redemption, and of the divine decrees; while bigots of every persuasion condemn and persecute one another, the enlightened philanthropist, of whatever denomination he may be, sees in every man a brother; and regards the whole collective mass of mankind as one vast family, the children of one common Father. While the bigot breathes nothing but intolerance and persecution against those who happen to have opinions different from himself, the enlightened and benevolent christian considers the different nations of mankind as living under different dispensations, and resigns them all into the hands of the Divine Being, who rules and disposes all things as he thinks fit, and in a manner which our feeble reason is not able to comprehend.

Confident that these remarks will meet with your approbation, and that your sentiments relative to this subject will perfectly coincide with mine.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

FROM a judicious and methodical study of history more advantages will be derived than can readily be enumerated ; but to pursue this kind of study, in such a manner as may enable us to derive instruction and authentic information from it, we ought carefully to be on our guard against the mistakes as well as the impositions of historians. History is a noble and useful, but a very defective part of literature. If we consider with what difficulty we arrive at the truth, in regard to affairs which are transacted in our own times, when the art of printing, so conducive to the general diffusion of knowledge, has opened the channels of information, and rendered both the communication of truth, and the detection of falsehood, more easy and expeditious than in former times, we cannot reasonably expect to find accurate accounts of the particular circumstances attending transactions and events which have taken place in former ages. If it were possible that historians could transmit to posterity the secret intrigues of courts and cabinets, and explore the true motives of human actions,

history would be much more valuable, as it would then display a more exact picture of the human mind, and develope more fully the secret causes of great events. But it cannot be supposed that they can obtain authentic information concerning things which are generally transacted with the utmost secrecy; and therefore, we must guard against the impositions of those historians, who, to embellish their works, have recourse to imagination, and make conjecture supply the place of authentic information. Such writers, not being able to inform us how their personages spoke and acted on certain occasions, make them speak and act as they themselves would have done in the same circumstances. The eloquent orations which appear in Livy, Josephus, Sallust, and other ancient historiographers, embellish their works, amuse the reader, and display to advantage the talents of the writer; but they are to be considered, for the most part, as the speeches of the historian, and not of the persons to whom they are attributed. - Some writers of history have the effrontery to pretend to give us a detail of the debates of the privy councils, and of the most secret conversations and cabals of courtiers, with as much formal precision as if they had been cabinet ministers in the courts of all the princes of the age concerning which they write; and as if nothing had been transacted or determined without their privacy; nor do they scruple to entertain us with circumstantial ac-

counts of a battle, or a siege; or even of the operations of a whole campaign, related with as much pretended accuracy as if they had taken the field with the army, and accompanied every detachment employed on different services during the whole contest. Such narrations ought always to be suspected; generally speaking, they ought to be totally disregarded. Mr. Boswell relates, that Dr. Johnson used to say, "We talk of history, but let us consider how little history, I mean real authentic history, we have. It is not to be questioned but such kings reigned, such battles were fought, such cities were taken, and such countries were conquered, as we find mentioned; but all the colouring of history is mere conjecture." In this Dr. Johnson is most perfectly right; almost all the [circumstantial] details we meet with in history ought to be regarded as the effusion of the historian's imagination. Their truth ought always to be questioned, although perhaps it may not be possible to prove their falsehood. It is only the outlines of history, the leading and important facts, which have been productive of great and conspicuous effects, that ought to attract our attention, excite our reflections, and hold a place in our remembrance. This method of studying history, will, indeed, contract its limits, and bring it within a narrower compass, but will much enhance its value by rejecting its errors and superfluities, and selecting the genuine information it

affords. In regard to historical details, whenever the historian undertakes to offer them to the perusal of his reader, he ought, at the peril of his reputation for veracity, to discover how, or from whence, he obtained such accurate information, otherwise he must pardon the incredulity of posterity, if they do not implicitly give credit to his bare word.

As to ingenious and rational conjectures relative to the causes, the consequences, and circumstances of transactions and events, they are certainly admissible, and even in many cases desirable in his history, as they may assist the reflections of the reader, by suggesting hints, which perhaps, might not have readily occurred to his mind; but they ought to be given only as conjectures, and not as facts. The observations and deductions of a sagacious and philosophical historian may exhibit a subject in a more luminous point of view than it would have immediately appeared in upon a bare recital of the fact; but the reflecting reader must still consider his remarks only as conjectures, unless the probabilities be so strong as to stamp upon them the mark and value of unquestionable authority. However, as it can hardly be expected that historians should, at all times, be so scrupulous as to describe the means by which they have obtained their information; and as such details would ever seem tedious to most readers, we ought, when we peruse their works, to examine and consider

much of their narratives bears the marks of truth; how much has the air of probability; and how much ought to be esteemed only as conjectural; and always endeavour to discriminate between conjecture and reality. Many historians have written several centuries after the transactions they relate took place, and consequently have compiled their works from scattered records and fragments of other histories, of which they were not able to ascertain the authenticity, or determine the degree of probability. They often could neither prove the veracity of the original writer, nor examine his opportunities and means of acquiring intelligence concerning his subject, nor know under what influence he composed his works. We know under what auspices *Voltaire* composed some of his historical tracts, and no one can be ignorant, that *Josephus* wrote his history of the wars of the Jews under Roman influence. Some have taken care to give their writings such a cast as they supposed would please their patrons, or procure them friends among persons of some particular class. Others have been in fear of the resentment of men in power: and others have been actuated by the desire of making every thing redound to the honour of their own country, or their own party. The accounts we have of the Greek and Roman affairs, it is to be observed, were all written by Greeks and Romans we must, in consequence, suppose some degree of national partiality in their relations, with thi

degree of difference, indeed, that the Greeks being divided into a number of independent and often hostile states, the constant rivals of each other's glory, reputation, and prosperity; and writers being numerous among them, they were, in some measure, mutual checks upon one another, which rendered falsehood more liable to detection among them than among the Romans; who being united in one vast political body, and inspired with the strongest national prejudices, had a better opportunity of composing their history to their own taste, and telling their respective tales as they pleased. However, if the national partiality of the Greeks did not tend so directly to one centre, as that of the Romans, the vivacity of their imagination, and their natural propensity to fiction, afforded an ample supply of matter for the fabrication of fabulous narrative. Indeed the early Grecian histories can hardly be accounted any thing more than a tissue of fables. Many of these remarks on Greek and Roman history are also applicable, in a qualified degree, to the generality of historians of other nations, and of other ages.

Of all the departments of historical writing, ecclesiastical history would be the most valuable, if we could rely on its impartial authenticity; but by a deplorable misfortune, and a strange perversion of things, that which ought to be the best is by far the worst; for here, in addition to the misinformation, and other defects incident to history in general, religious preju-

dices operate in a superlative degree. The annals of the church have been written almost wholly by ecclesiastics, strongly attached to some theological system, the support of which they considered as an indispensable duty, and no small step towards their eternal salvation. We cannot, therefore, expect to see an authentic and impartial history of the Christian Church produced by either Catholic or Protestant bigotry. If an impartial author should, at this day, undertake to write such an one, the documents he must compile it from are so tinctured with prejudice and the spirit of party, that he would soon perceive himself bewildered in the intricate maze of religious contest, and find the truth so obscured by the cavils and contradictions of theological writers, as to present insurmountable obstacles to the complete execution of his design. The evil is consequently now irremediable. It may, however, be alleviated by the judgment and penetration of the reader, strictly observing this general rule, that in estimating the intrinsic value of the works of historians, politicians, and divines, but especially the last, we must, in the first place, endeavour to discover under what influence of prejudice, passion, or interest, they sat down to write, and then make proper allowances for the effects which such influence might justly be supposed to produce on their minds. This is the clue which must guide us through the labyrinth of contradictory assertions, jarring opinions, and different representations of the same circumstances and

actions ; direct our judgment in appreciating the merit of authors, and determine the credibility of their testimony, and the deference due to their opinions. Without this exercise of the reasoning faculties, books will as often mislead as instruct us. In making an estimate of the authenticity of historical relations, three principal rules are to be observed, the probability or improbability of the facts recorded, the nature of the evidence attesting them, and in what degree they are corroborated or contradicted by the general circumstances of the world in the period of time alluded to. On these principles the reader must exercise a discretionary power of yielding or suspending his belief ; but he ought carefully to avoid the two extremes of scepticism and credulity, which are equally inimical to the improvement of the human mind.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER V.

SIR,

ANOTHER consideration, of equal and still more evident importance, must arise spontaneously in the mind of every reader.

An accurate acquaintance with geography and chronology is essential to the knowledge of history. These are the two great luminaries of history, which, without their light, would only be a confused chaos. Without a due attention to the circumstances of time and place, no narra-

tive of facts would be intelligible, nor could the causes and consequences of the events be investigated.

Geography is an instructive science, and the study of it peculiarly delightful; but, like history, it is subject to a multiplicity of errors and defects. These, however, are less difficult to correct than the mistakes of history. The distance of a thousand miles, like the lapse of a thousand years, leaves considerable room for error, and gives great opportunity of imposing on the credulity of readers by fictitious descriptions; but these errors, or impositions, of geographical writers, are liable to be remarked and corrected by each subsequent traveller; and this consideration is sufficient to deter any writer, who pays the least regard to his reputation, from indulging in falshood.

In regard to the correction of errors, as well as to the supply of defects, a remarkable and peculiar circumstance discriminates between the works of geographers and those of historians. Geography always lies open to improvement and correction, while the transactions and events of history, being past and gone, sink every day more and more into obscurity. The truth of geographical description may be satisfactorily ascertained, or its falshood detected, by subsequent enquiry; but historical facts no longer exist, except in the records of the times and the remembrance of posterity. Countries may be revisited, but past transactions cannot be recalled

CHRONOLOGY.

and again exhibited to our inspection. Geographers may sometimes, in order to swell their volumes, or amuse their readers, indulge themselves a little in fiction, in their descriptions of countries little known and seldom visited; but this cannot be done in regard to countries of general notice, without incurring the hazard and danger of immediate detection; and all those parts of the world, which have been the theatre of the transactions of ancient and modern history, are so well known, and have been so often described, that no very material error or imposition is to be apprehended in that respect. The study of geography is extremely entertaining, and the knowledge of that science is so easy to acquire, that ignorance of it is unpardonable in a person who makes the least pretensions to literary or scientific attainments. It is also so superlatively useful, and so universally interesting, that every individual of mankind has some connection with it.

A celebrated writer has said, that "every son and daughter of Adam is more or less concerned with geography." It is, indeed, a science so necessary to every person desirous of general information relative to the affairs of the world, that without a competent knowledge of it no historical relation can be well understood; and to a person ignorant of geography, even a common newspaper is unintelligible.

In regard to the chronological part of history, it is far more to the purpose to fix in the mind a

just arrangement of contemporary characters, and contemporary events, or at least of such as are nearly so, than to load the memory with a dry and burdensome list of dates. By this method a person may furnish his mind with a regular system of chronology, always ready for application, without troublesome research or laborious recollection. A person who has read history as it ought to be read, will, on calling to mind any remarkable character, circumstance, or æra, immediately recollect every other conspicuous contemporary character and event. If he reflect on any remarkable period in the history of any particular nation, the political, religious, and civil circumstances, not only of that but of the surrounding nations, will immediately present themselves to his view. He will be able at all times, and on every occasion, to place before his eyes a picture of the moral world, and, at one comprehensive glance, take a distinct survey of the existing circumstances and general condition of mankind in different periods of time. In a similar manner, a person who has a just and comprehensive knowledge of geography, will find it easy to delineate instantaneously in his mind, as on a map, the whole known surface of the terraqueous globe, its natural and political divisions, and principal subdivisions, the seas, rivers, mountains, &c. with which it is diversified, as well as the cities of principal note; &c. It will not be amiss to observe, that it very much facilitates the acquisition of geographical know-

ledge, to accustom one self to remember what places are situated under, or nearly under, the same meridians and parallels. This contributes very much to the methodical arrangement of geographical ideas, and helps to fix in the mind a true representation of the surface of the earth.

It may be objected, that such a methodical arrangement of historical and geographical knowledge in the mind is a laborious task. The case is exactly the contrary, as I can assert from my own experience. The acquisition is perfectly easy, and requires only a little method and reflection in perusing such books as treat of these subjects. The easy and expeditious performance of work, of whatever kind it may be, depends in a great measure on going the right way about it. When the foundation is well laid, the superstructure is easy to raise; method facilitates every kind of business, and every kind of study; and, by making it easy, makes it agreeable. Whether we study arithmetic or geometry; whether mathematical or classical learning be the object of our pursuit, whatever we read, whatever science we study, unless we read and study methodically, we do little more than accumulate a confused assemblage of undigested ideas, which can never constitute knowledge. We find many persons who have spent much time in reading, but have acquired little knowledge, because they have read without method, and without reflection. Such readers commonly forget what they have read as soon as the book is laid out of their

56 ADVANTAGE OF METHOD IN READING.

hands, and never fail to blame the weakness of their memory, or the multiplicity of their avocations; but the fault is rather to be attributed to the want of method than to a defect of memory; for it is certain, that if a person studies any thing methodically, if he contemplates it in every light in which it can possibly be exhibited, and considers it with all its combinations, connections, and dependencies, he acquires such a knowledge of it, as no multiplicity or variety of avocations, no length of time, or any other circumstance, can wholly obliterate, excepting the case of a physical defect of memory, or a constitutional imbecility of mind. It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that a multiplicity of pursuits or employments, in conjunction with lapse of time and cessation from study, will efface from the memory a great number of circumstantial minutiae; but the general combination of ideas, and the general representation of things, still remain; so that, although a person may, at the first thought, find himself a little at a loss, yet a very small degree of recollection will recal to his mind, and retrace in his memory, the obscured and dispersed, but not effaced ideas. A well combined and connected train of ideas may be compared to a chain, of which, if you draw one link after you, all the others will immediately follow. These observations are equally applicable to the study of every art and science, and equally hold good in regard to every subject of human knowledge, and every incident of common life. They

are exemplified, and their propriety demonstrated, by uniform experience. Whatever is once deeply impressed on the mind, is never totally effaced from the memory. Every affair, every transaction, with which we have been perfectly acquainted, in connection with all its circumstances, always remains in our remembrance; and, although ever so long unnoticed and unthought of, with a little recollection, becomes present to the mind, while things which have been little noticed by us, with which we have been but slightly acquainted, and which have consequently made only a slight and transient impression, escape the memory, by having left only some faint and obscure traces, which are soon worn out, and cannot easily be recollected and re-arranged.

I am, Sir, your's, &c..

LETTER VI.

SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING the errors and defects to which history is liable, an acquaintance with it is indispensably necessary to every person who desires to possess any share of general knowledge above the illiterate vulgar. This is so universally acknowledged, that there has never been any distinguished political or literary character who was not acquainted with history, and also with geography, its inseparable concomitant; so far at least as those sciences were cultivated and understood in the age in which he lived; and at

this day, in every country where science and literature are known, no person who is designed to make a conspicuous figure in letters, or in life, is left uninstructed in those sciences, which always constitute an essential part of a liberal education.

The various imperfections of history, many of which proceed from causes absolutely unavoidable, depreciate its value, without, however, superseding the necessity of an acquaintance with it. If it be not such as it ought to be, we must study it such as it is. Mature reflection and just reasoning will often tend much to remedy its defects, and direct our judgment in examining motives and actions, in tracing causes and effects, and in estimating the preponderance of opposite evidences and varying probabilities.

History constitutes so essential a part of the Belles Lettres, that no literary acquirements can be complete without the knowledge of it. The orator, the poet, the moralist, and the divine, make frequent allusions to historical subjects, to celebrated transactions, remarkable events or institutions, customs, or manners, of different ages and different countries. A person, therefore, who is unacquainted with history, cannot well understand either rhetorical or poetical compositions; or the works of the moral philosopher, or the theologian.

It is not, however, to be supposed, that it is necessary to retain in the memory all that mass of uninteresting, or unauthenticated, circum-

stances and conjectural details with which historians have swelled their volumes; the greatest part of those imaginary relations, even supposing them indisputably true, would hardly be worth a place in the memory. The conspicuous outlines of history; leading facts of unquestionable authenticity, corroborated by evident consequences, and the existing circumstances of the world; great and important events, which have had a decided and visible influence on the general aspect of human affairs; distinguished characters who have been principal agents in important transactions; the origin and influence of political, civil, and religious establishments; the general condition of mankind, in different periods of time, these are the subjects which claim the reader's attention, and ought to occupy a place in his remembrance.

Distinguished characters and memorable events are a kind of historical land-marks, to which causes and consequences may be referred, and by which the chronological order of a number of subordinate and dependent circumstances may be regulated and remembered.

A general and comprehensive view of the history of the human species, delineated from these leading traits and marked outlines, would be equally instructive and entertaining. It would present to the eye of contemplation a picture of human affairs, and of the moral aspect of the world in successive periods; and, by concentrating the most valuable parts of historical in-

PRIMEVAL STATE OF MAN.

formation, prove an useful and convenient summary, after a person has travelled through the ponderous volumes of ancient and modern history.

I have conceived a design of this kind, and shall attempt to carry it into execution, in the course of our future correspondence. In the mean time, while most respectfully,

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

SIR,

IN contemplating those great outlines of history, the memorable and important events which have determined the condition of mankind, and rendered the aspect of the moral and intellectual world such as we see it at this day, we shall find ample matter for observation and reflection. In many cases we shall be obliged to have recourse to conjecture, founded on different degrees of probability, and some of those probabilities may be so corroborated, by general existing circumstances, as to amount almost to certainty.

Of the primeval state of mankind we know little from historical information, and can enlarge our ideas of it only from conjecture, founded on the nature of things. It is reasonable to suppose, that men had long existed before they began to write the history of what passed among them. Their whole attention would, at first, be engrossed by studying the means of supplying their physi-

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cal wants, and rendering their existence, in some degree, comfortable. In that state of simple nature they would hardly think of transmitting an account of their actions to posterity, nor could they have any thing worth recording. Here our knowledge of human nature, and of human wants, will supply the deficiency of history. From the experience of our wants, and of the means of supplying them, we may form a conjecture, more than probable, that houses, or at least huts, would be built as a shelter from the inclemency of the weather. Some attention would be paid to agriculture, in order to make the earth bring forth such productions as were necessary for the nourishment of the body : cattle would be tamed and made subservient to the will of man. These things would naturally be attended to ; and the arts, the most essential to the comfortable existence of the human species, would be invented before letters were brought into use, and the thoughts of the mind committed to writing. From all these circumstances we may reasonably suppose, that the first rude sketch of history would be the traditionary tales delivered from father to son, through successive generations ; and these, in fact, constitute the basis of the first historical records. Such are the fabulous relations of the first historians among the Greeks. They had adopted the historical legends of the Egyptian priests, who were accustomed to cover their religion and their learning with the mystical veil of allegory ; and the Greeks, in many cases,

mistaking their mode of allegorizing the early periods of history, have presented us with an absurd and monstrous tissue of fabulous narrative of kings who never reigned, and heroes of celestial descent. Superstition being natural to mankind, before the mind is enlightened by philosophy, it is no wonder that the first historians stuffed their works with narratives of the communication of gods and demi-gods with mankind, and of the frequent interference of supernatural agents in human affairs. The lively imagination of the early Greek writers, heated with superstition, and unrestrained by philosophy, branched out into wild exuberance, and fabricated the most absurd tales. On this account the period of time which elapsed from the establishment of political and civil society in Greece, to the Trojan war, may be justly denominated the fabulous age; and, indeed, the greater part of what is related concerning that war, has evident marks of fiction stamped upon it; for all the historical accounts we have of it are originally founded on the poetical effusions of Homer's creative fancy. Strictly speaking, there is nothing that can lay claim to the title of a history of Grecian affairs before the Persian wars. As to the histories of the other heathen nations, they were not less fabulous and absurd than those of the Greeks; and, indeed, all that we are told concerning them, has been transmitted to us through the medium of Greek writers.

When we consider the general state of the

world, in the early ages, in regard to political, commercial, and literary communication : however we may amuse ourselves with perusing the accounts transmitted to us of the transactions of remote antiquity, reason tells us, that every thing we read of that kind, can deserve no other name than that of fiction or historical romance ;—until the Greeks, those celebrated inventors, or at least improvers of arts and sciences, whose literary efforts have been the means of diffusing knowledge through the world, had attained to a considerable height of opulence and civilization ; and until the arts of necessity being brought to a tolerable degree of perfection, those of convenience, luxury, and elegance, began to flourish among them ; a period which cannot be fixed any long time before the first Persian war, which took place about five hundred and three years before Christ.

This may be fixed as the epoch of the commencement of profane history ; as for all that can be learned concerning the state of mankind, and the events which took place in the world before that period, we must have recourse to the sacred writings of the Jews for information relative to those particulars. This consideration naturally leads us to turn our attention to those records of the Jewish nation, always esteemed sacred by that people, and of which the authenticity has been acknowledged by the most considerable and the most enlightened part of mankind. It would, indeed, be unpardonable, in a

survey of ancient history, not to attempt to make a just estimation of the value of those celebrated records which have so long attracted the veneration of Christians, and excited the ridicule of infidels.

The Jewish annals are by far the most ancient of any that have come down to us ; and, without drawing any advantage from their divine authority, the most intrinsically rational and probable. They likewise contain a series of transactions and events equally curious and interesting. In these writings we find the only rational account of the creation of the world, and the beginning of things ; of the dispersion of mankind, and the origin of ancient nations : and strict impartiality must confess, that the relation of these events, independent of the high authority by which it is sanctioned, bears intrinsical marks of probability. The scriptural account of the creation is incomparably more rational than the absurd cosmogonies of the Greeks ; and when analyzed, appears not only probable, but strictly philosophical. The scriptural account of the creation represents the separation of these luminous and volatile parts of matter which constitute light, from those which are more heavy and opaque, as the first work of creation ; or, in other words, the first operation of nature, after the command of the Supreme and Eternal Being had put in motion the vast chaos of unformed matter, floating in the immensity of space ; and so it must have been, according to every proba-

bility of philosophical conjecture. The second period is represented as that in which the waters, being separated from the earth, a firmament was erected, dividing the waters from the waters; an expression, which, to our conception at this time, appears obscure and almost unintelligible; but of which the meaning seems to be, that the terrene particles having sunk into solid globes, the aqueous particles being lighter, floated on the top; and covered the whole surface of the earth and other opaque bodies; and that the waters thus overflowing, the planets were separated by the intervening expanse of air, called the firmament. The third process of creation, was the descent of the waters into the vallies, or lowest parts of the earth, and other planets, whereby seas and land were formed; and the land being left dry, acquired its vegetative power, and began to bring forth its various productions. The fourth period is described as that in which the volatile particles of light were formed into compact bodies, constituting the sun and fixed stars, which are different suns, enlightening different systems. The fifth and sixth periods are distinguished by the creation of animal life; and last of all, man, the master-piece of nature, was formed; and this could not be until the earth had attained to the perfection of its vegetative power, so as to produce what was necessary for the subsistence of men and animals. This hypothesis of natural philosophy, and of the properties of matter, are precisely such as a philosopher

66 CONJECTURES ON THE CREATION.

might suppose the gradual process of nature to have been, when the Almighty Fiat had given to the various parts of matter their different properties, and put in motion the innumerable atoms which compose the universe, however long or short we may suppose the different periods of this process to have been. For it is doubted whether those periods were natural days, marked by the rotation of the earth upon its axis; as, during the three first periods or days, the light is represented only as separated from the darkness, or the luminous from the opaque particles, and floating at random in the vast expanse: and the sun, and other luminous orbs, not being formed until the fourth period, day and night could not, before that time, have been discriminated by the appearing and disappearing of the celestial orbs. As to what follows, relating to the garden of Eden, if it be taken as a real narrative of facts, it contains nothing improbable or incredible. Of the longevity of the Antediluvians, if we have no collateral proofs, no concurrent circumstances, to corroborate the scriptural account, it is evident that none such can be expected, and we have no contradictory evidence to invalidate its authenticity; and it was, undoubtedly, as easy to the Sovereign Disposer of all things, to frame the constitution of the human body to continue nine hundred as only ninety years.

The book of Genesis, whether or not written by Moses, which at least is highly probable, as it relates almost entirely to things which were

done before, any written history existed, must have been communicated to the author, whoever he was, either by tradition or revelation; and if it be supposed a traditionary account, some slight variety in names and dates might creep in, without tending in the least to invalidate the general authenticity of the book. Of the subsequent writings of Moses, the book of Exodus is partly historical and partly legislative; and that of Leviticus wholly of the latter kind. The book of Numbers is mostly historical; and that of Deuteronomy consists of a repetition of many of the laws promulgated in the two former books, with some additional ones, intermixed with eloquent exhortations to obedience; but contains little historical matter, except the relation of the death of Moses, added by some succeeding writer. In all these books, Moses positively declares, that the laws and ordinances he gives to the people, are the commands of the Supreme Being, expressly and unequivocally revealed to him; but, in regard to historical facts, he appeals sometimes to the testimony of their own knowledge, and sometimes to the evidence of tradition received from their fathers. The book of Joshua contains a narrative of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, and was probably written by Joshua himself, or at least by his direction; but it is unknown by whom the book of the Judges was composed; most probably by different persons at different times; as it appears to be a collection of detached pieces of history,

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in which the chronological order is not strictly observed, and in some places is not easy to adjust. These accounts relate to a period exceedingly tumultuous and troublesome; a period of barbarism, ignorance, and anarchy; in which the Israelites, almost continually harrassed by intestine commotions, oppressed by foreign enemies, or employed in repelling their aggressions, had little leisure to attend to the accuracy of their national annals. When we come to the books of Samuel, the prospect begins to grow a little clearer. The affairs of the Israelites began under the administration of that judge and prophet, to assume a more settled appearance; and the scriptural historians seem to have written in a more connected manner. The books of the Kings and the Chronicles display an exactness, in regard to chronology, and the other essential requisites of history, which gives them, in this respect, a decided superiority over all the other records of remote antiquity. The age of each of the kings of Judah, at his accession, and the duration of his reign, are expressly mentioned, so that not only the whole term of each of their lives, but also the whole duration of the Jewish monarchy, from the accession of David to the Babylonian captivity, may be easily calculated. All the outlines and leading facts are so clearly exhibited, and so firmly corroborated, by collateral evidence, by the perpetual observance of solemn festivals, instituted in commemoration of important events, and by their connection with

the contemporary circumstances of other nations, (particularly the Egyptians and Babylonians) that, considered as a history of political occurrences and national events, the Jewish records have a claim to authenticity, infinitely superior to what can be allowed, in that respect, to any other history of the same antiquity. The history of the Israelitish nation, during the period of its existence, at first in one, and then divided into two separate kingdoms, is simple, clear, connected, and chronologically coherent; and with the exception of a few dates and numbers, which might be easily mistaken in transcribing, bears indisputable marks of authenticity, while it exhibits the transactions of a period in which the Greeks were only just emerging from barbarism: and during which their histories consist of nothing but lying legends of gods and heroes, and fictitious tales of sovereigns who never reigned, and of persons who never existed.

It has been remarked, that the Jewish historians frequently impute their national calamities to the vices of their monarchs. If, however, we examine the dreadful denunciations of the prophets against the nobles, the opulent inhabitants, and especially against the priests, we shall find reason to conclude, that the calamities sometimes imputed by their historians to the crimes of their princes, might with equal propriety have been attributed to the Divine vengeance on the sins of the priests and people. The imputation, however, is not incompatible with moral equity.

70 AUTHENTICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

It is a position consistent with reason, and confirmed by experience, that the misconduct of rulers is detrimental to the nation at large, by natural operation of moral causes. The same remark may be made on the denunciations, or rather the predictions of calamity to the children for the vices of their parents. This is the same thing as if we should say to a person in affluent circumstances, whose expences are greater than his fortune can bear, "You may probably never experience want yourself, but you cannot fail of entailing poverty upon your posterity." The calamities brought on posterity, by the crimes and misconduct of their forefathers, are not inconsistent with moral justice, as some infidels pretend, but necessarily result from the invariable connection between causes and consequences, as might be exemplified by innumerable instances. Several of the kings of Israel and Judah, as many other princes have done, alienated, by their moral or political vices, the minds of their subjects, or otherwise brought on such a train of unfavorable circumstances, as, in the end, proved fatal to their posterity; and it is unnecessary to travel far in the walks of history, or to extend much the sphere of our own observations, to perceive that this has been the case with many persons in private as well as in public life. Besides all this, by a figurative expression, the vices of the nation may, on some occasions, be called the vices of the king, its representative and head; or this mode of speaking may sometimes be used

to denote the prevalent vices of the reign, and not altogether the personal vices of the prince alone.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

SIR,

THE reign of David is illustrious and interesting: it shews us, a man raised from an obscure station to the throne of Israel, after experiencing a variety of fortune; and when placed in that exalted station, aggrandizing his power by a strong military force, extending his dominions by conquest, and enriching himself and his subjects by the spoils of their enemies. It also displays a prospect far more interesting to a reader, who delights in contemplating the prosperity of a numerous people, rather than in tracing the bloody footsteps of a conqueror. It exhibits to our view the establishment of a monarchy hitherto tottering and precarious; the institution of civil and religious regulations and ordinances, and the rapid advancement to tranquillity and opulence of a people but just emerged from obscurity and anarchy. The succeeding reign of Solomon presents us with a brilliant view of the kingdom of Israel in the zenith of its opulence, felicity, and splendor; and enjoying all the sweets of tranquillity, in such a manner, and for such a length of time, as that nation had never before experienced, either since the establishment of monar-

chical government, or at any time previous to that period. The kingdom of Israel now stood high in the political scale of nations. It gave the law to all the petty kingdoms between the Euphrates and the Levant, called, in scripture, the Great Sea; and held the balance between the two great monarchies of Egypt and Assyria. The channels of commerce were opened, and their sources explored in a manner, which, at that early period, must appear extraordinary. The fleets of Israel, under the direction of Tyrian Mariners, traded to the land of Ophir, which some conjecture to have been the coast of India, or some of the Oriental islands; while others place it on the eastern coast of Africa; and by their lucrative voyages augmented the wealth of the nation which David had already enriched with the spoils of war. This agreeable and brilliant prospect does not, however, long continue. Solomon, infatuated, it seems, by uninterrupted prosperity, set no bounds to his magnificence and luxury, and laid heavy taxes on the people, ¹In order to support so exorbitant an expenditure. These burdensome imposts created disaffection in the minds of his subjects; and, towards the end of his reign, gave rise to a dangerous and potent faction, which, on the accession of his son, broke out into open rebellion, and ended in the revolt of the ten tribes from their allegiance to the house of David. The revolted tribes having elected Jeroboam for their king, the monarchy was split into the separate

kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The state policy of the new king of Israel produced a religious, as well as a political separation; for Jeroboam, apprehending that while the kings of Judah held the temple where the sacrifices were offered, and whither all the people were obliged at stated times to resort, they would always have an ascendancy over the kingdom of Israel, unless some measures should be taken to prevent those frequent visits of his subjects to the metropolis of Judah. The priests, the Levites, and all who were concerned in the ministry of religion, were firmly attached to the house of David; and Jeroboam supposed that they would naturally make use of the ascendancy which religion gave them over the people, in order to alienate their affection from his government, and bring them again to their allegiance to that family. Jeroboam, in order to prevent those almost inevitable consequences of the continuance of his subjects in religious communion with the house of David, and kingdom of Judah, sacrificing the interests of religion to his political views, built a new temple, instituted a new priesthood, and thus produced a schism among the followers of the Mosaical law, which was never extinguished. The religion of the ten tribes, soon after this separation, deviating more and more from the original institutions of the law, became, in a little time, a mixture of Judaism and Pagan idolatry, and such it ever after continued.

After this memorable epoch of the Israelitish

history, scarcely any thing more is found in the annals of that nation, but such transactions and events as are the ordinary subjects of political records. The history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, like those of all other ancient nations, presents us with little else than a continued scene of uninteresting wars, massacres, murders, rebellions, and usurpations; which last were very frequent in the kingdom of Israel, although that of Judah adhered, with an unalterable attachment, to the lineal descendants of David. The history, in fine, of both nations, from the period of their separation, is little else than an uninteresting catalogue of the crimes and the calamities of a declining people, till at last we see the total extinction of the kingdom of the ten tribes, who were transported into Assyria, and dispersed into different parts of the country, from whence they never returned; and the common people who were left in the country were intermixed with strangers; from which mixture of different nations sprung that motley race, afterwards known by the name of Samaritans. This event happened about B. C. 720. The tottering kingdom of Judah still continued to enjoy a precarious existence; invaded at different times by the Babylonians, rendered tributary, and at last entirely subjugated; its metropolis and temple raised to their very foundations by Nebuchadnezzar, B. C. 587, and all the principal persons and useful hands transported to Babylon. If we consider the barbarous manners of the age, and the

sanguinary mode of making war then in use, it will appear that the king of Babylon acted, in this conquest, with as much lenity as could be expected, after the repeated provocations he had received from Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar had placed the crown of Judah upon the head of that prince, after deposing his nephew Jeconiah. He had not imposed upon him any hard conditions.—He had not required any change in the national religion or laws.—He had not obliged him to receive a Babylonian garrison into Jerusalem, or any of the fortresses of Judah.—He had not deprived him of the management of the national revenue and expenditure, nor of the administration of public affairs. Under the easy conditions of tribute and alliance, Zedekiah had received from the hand of the Babylonian monarch a sceptre, which, without his favor and powerful support, he never would have swayed ; yet, notwithstanding so signal a favor, he afterwards renounced the friendship of that prince, and entering into a confederacy with Egypt, the enemy and rival of the Babylonian greatness, manifested the most determined and rancorous hostility against his great benefactor, from whom he had received his crown and kingdom, and to whom he had sworn fidelity in the name of the God of Israel : thus consummating his guilt by adding perjury to treason. It is, therefore, no matter of wonder, that an ambitious and powerful conqueror should give the world a terrible

example of his vengeance on a perfidious prince, whose conscience oaths could not bind; whose fidelity no favors could engage; and from whom he had received such ungrateful treatment.

However, notwithstanding the provocations which Nebuchadnezzar had received from the Jewish nation and its king, it does not appear that he made the people the object of his vengeance. The guilty monarch was made a signal example of Divine and human vengeance, on the detestable crimes of perjury and ingratitude; and the punishment of death was immediately inflicted on all the principal officers of his court and army, who had been the counsellors or abettors of his revolt: but the guilt of those men being expiated by their blood, the remaining part of the inhabitants were treated with lenity. The principal citizens, and most skilful artists, of every description, were removed to Babylon, where they enjoyed considerable privileges; and the husbandmen and common people had lands assigned them, which they rented, although we are not informed upon what terms, of the Babylonians.

Some remarkable events which took place during the captivity are related in the book of Daniel; in particular, the erection of the statue of Belus, in the plain of Dura, either in the environs, or within the city of Babylon; and the adventure of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, in consequence of their refusing to worship the idol. Here we may observe, that although, per-

haps, thousands of Jews then in Babylon did not join in this idolatrous worship, it does not appear that they were called in question on that account; and it seems that the three men above-mentioned being persons of distinction, employed by the king, and in his favor, they were singled out on that occasion by some intriguing courtiers, and accused of disobedience to the king's command, while the conduct of others was connived at. Indeed, as the Jews were always allowed liberty of conscience in Babylon, and, unless in this particular instance, do not appear ever to have been compelled to conform to the idolatrous worship established in that place, there is reason to think that the generality of the king's edict was the contrivance of a cabal of courtiers, who had counselled the king to issue it, in order to implicate some individuals who were obnoxious to them.

The insanity of Nebuchadnezzar is another very remarkable circumstance, and is related in language so strongly figurative, that it has perplexed many common readers not conversant with scripture phraseology. There is no ground, however, to call the fact in question. It is, perhaps, a vain attempt to endeavour to reconcile the contradictory computations of chronologers relative to many occurrences which happened in the ages of remote antiquity. Jerusalem was taken in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and the term of the captivity was 70 years; but it is not possible to ascertain the du-

ration of this reign ; and it is equally impossible to discover exactly at what time the books of the scripture were collected and arranged ; but it is well known that this was done soon after the return of the Jews from the captivity. From these circumstances, therefore, it seems probable, that this extraordinary history was written within about fifty years after the thing happened. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch as well as the most distinguished political and military character of the age in which he lived, and in every respect the most conspicuous personage that had appeared upon the theatre of the world. Some of the Jews who returned from the captivity, as well as some of the aged inhabitants of Babylon, could, perhaps, when this account was written, remember his reign, and the circumstance of his insanity. At least his reign could not fail, at that time, to be fresh in the memory of the inhabitants of those countries. So remarkable a circumstance, in the history of so conspicuous and celebrated a character, must have been universally known and publicly talked of, both by the Jews and the Babylonians. In such circumstances a fabrication of that nature must have been immediately detected.

* The sacred historians relate, that Nebuchadnezzar, walking in the garden of his palace, and having his thoughts absorbed in the contemplation of his own greatness and power, and insensible to whom he was indebted for them, his reason suddenly departed from him. This is no

physical improbability. Thousands of similar cases may be found in the annals of medical experience. They then tell us, that from a man he was transformed into a beast; a strong figurative expression, used to signify his deprivation of reason, the distinguishing characteristic of human nature, which discriminates man from the brute creation. By the representation of his hair growing like eagle's feathers, and his nails like bird's claws, that deformity of his exterior appearance, which must naturally be the consequence of so dreadful a state of insanity, is hyperbolically expressed. As to his running wild with the beasts of the field, &c. it is probable that the unfortunate maniac spent the greatest part of his time in wandering about in the gardens and groves belonging to the royal palace, though under the inspection of persons appointed to watch over his safety.

It appears, that during the monarch's indisposition, Evilmerodach, his son and successor, had governed the kingdom in the quality of regent. Nebuchadnezzar, by his political and military talents, his extensive conquests and stupendous works, both in Babylon and the adjacent country, had undoubtedly acquired a powerful ascendancy over the minds of his subjects; and on his restoration to the possession of his intellectual faculties, his regal power was delivered to him inviolate. The monarch, on the recovery of his reason, appears to have made suitable reflections on his crimes and sufferings, and to

have acquired just ideas of the weakness and insufficiency of man, (although ever so highly exalted) of the instability of all human power and grandeur, and of the absolute subjection of the greatest monarchs to the will of that supreme and omnipotent Being, who, according to the irresistible decrees of his providence, disposes all things as he pleases. This is the genuine representation of the fact related in this remarkable story.

We come now to that interesting period of the Jewish history which is marked by their restoration to their liberty, their country, and their national existence, through the favor of the Persian monarchs, who, in a most liberal and munificent manner, opened the royal treasury, in order to give them the pecuniary assistance they stood in need of for the rebuilding of the temple and city. In the subjugation of the Jews, and the destruction of Jerusalem, by Nebuchadnezzar, brought into a contrasted point of view with their restoration by Cyrus and the succeeding kings of Persia, we have a luminous display of the wonderful manner in which the Divine Providence, by an irresistible control, directs and governs all human affairs. Nebuchadnezzar is constantly represented, by the scriptural historians and prophets, as the chosen minister of God's vengeance on a criminal nation; and Cyrus is also, in the most explicit manner, declared the instrument of his clemency to be displayed in its restoration; but we are not to imagine that

any such consideration influenced the political measures of the cabinets of Babylon and Persia. Nebuchadnezzar, in his conquest of Judea, as in all his other enterprises, was stimulated by ambition and avarice, as well as by revenge, against a prince who had most ungratefully treated him, and thereby had given him a plausible pretext for aggrandizing his power, by the total subjugation of that country, and for appropriating to himself the wealth of the metropolis and the temple. Similar motives, no doubt, actuated Cyrus in the war against the Babylonians, and the subversion of their monarchy. That prince, as well as his successors, seems to have been favorable to the Jewish religion, as the Persians detested the image worship of the Babylonians. They might, probably, fancy some affinity between that religion and their own, an account of the sacred fire kept burning by the Jewish priests in the temple, as the Persians esteemed that element a symbol of the divinity. But it may be conjectured, with a very great appearance of probability, that the Persian kings looked with a jealous eye on the strength and population of Babylon, and the aversion of its inhabitants to the Persian government, which afterwards broke out in a dangerous and obstinate revolt, in the reign of Darius Hystaspes; and the departure of so great a number of the Jews, who, after so long a residence, were become almost naturalized in Babylon, might be considered as one of the most effectual means of weakening and

bringing gradually to decay that disaffected city which seems always to have been one of the political maxims of the Persian court. Thus we see, that although both Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus were actuated only by their own political views, yet those views, and the enterprises originating from them were under a direction which they could not see ; and thus it is that Divine Providence renders the operation of human passions subservient to its impenetrable designs, and governs all by an absolute control, regulating all mundane affairs according to the vast and complicated plan of causes and effects existing through everlasting ages, in the eternal prescience of God, without infringing the liberty or restraining the free will of man. The whole series of causes and effects, the infinitely diversified train of physical and moral circumstances, and the continued succession of events, are, from all eternity, present to the Divine intellect ; but all events are produced by a train of causes and consequences, by a combination of circumstances so closely connected, that without one another cannot exist. The history of the world is nothing less than the history of God's eternal Providence : and although some of its pages may be beyond the reach of our comprehension, it is, nevertheless, our duty to study the mysterious and interesting volume.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER IX.

SIR,

OF all the curious and interesting prospects which history opens to our view, the progressive advancement of the human mind, in the improvement of its faculties, is the most agreeable. The destructive exploits of conquerors may dazzle for a moment, but the silent labours of the student and the artist, of the architect and the husbandman, which embellish the earth, and convert it into a terrestrial paradise, although they do not shine with so conspicuous a glare, diversify the picture with milder colours and more beautiful shades. The arts and sciences embellish the world, and the investigation of their origin and progress would be the noblest ornament of history. How great then is the misfortune, that the ancient historians have almost entirely overlooked so grand and pleasing a subject; and that all the knowledge we can acquire concerning those things, must be gleaned from broken fragments and scattered hints laboriously picked out from a multifarious and confused mass of unimportant particulars! It is, however, the part of every reader to endeavour, as much as possible, to acquire some general knowledge of the history of the human mind, and of civilized society. Let us, therefore, cast a glance, and only a transient glance it can be, over the period already traversed, and which is

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included within the limits of the scriptural history.

This period includes the whole space of time from the creation until the subversion of the Babylonian monarchy. During this long succession of ages, a great variety of political, civil, and religious establishments, had been formed ; the rudiments of several arts and sciences had been invented ; the human mind had, in some countries, been much improved ; and the earth cultivated and embellished with large cities and stately edifices ; of these interesting subjects few particulars have been transmitted to us, except such as relate to the Jewish laws and institutions, some scattered hints relative to ancient commerce, and some excellent specimens of writing in the Prophets and Psalms. In those venerable monuments of antiquity, the sacred writings, we trace the Israelites, from the patriarchal ages, through the turbulent times of barbaric ignorance, to a considerable degree of civilization and refinement. Of their civil and religious institutions we have a clear and explicit account. As to their skill in the arts and sciences we have but little information ; nor do any circumstances appear which can give us a very exalted idea of it. The Jews do not seem ever to have been a scientific or philosophical nation. They appear to have been well skilled in all the arts of necessity and of conveniency, but not to have made any remarkable progress in those of luxury and embellishment. Of their literature we can form

a more exact estimation. Some excellent specimens have been transmitted to us in the scriptures, especially in the writings of the prophets, and in the Psalms. In the historical parts of the scripture we find a remarkable plainness of style and conciseness of narrative, and a wonderful perspicuity in the didactical pieces. The writings of their prophets are, for the most part, composed in a poetical style, but very different one from another, and all of them originals. Most of them abound with the most elevated ideas and sentiments, expressed with the greatest energy of diction, and embellished with the most brilliant ornaments of oriental imagery. Isaiah, in particular, to comprehension of thought and splendor of ideas, joins a style at once so energetic, and so sweetly harmonious and flowing, that he has often been called the Demosthenes of the Hebrews; and his writings are sufficient to give us an exalted opinion of the Hebrew literature. As to the commerce of those early ages we can form no more than a very imperfect idea; and, to form any idea of it, we must have recourse to the observation of general circumstances, occasional intimations, and often to conjecture. It is, however, observable, that even in the patriarchal ages commerce was so far known, that gold and silver were used as the medium whereby it was regulated; and the arts of embellishment were so far cultivated in some countries, that bracelets, rings, and other ornamental articles of dress, were already in use. Where, or by

whom, those trinkets were fabricated we are not informed ; but it is most likely they were of Egyptian manufacture, as from the early and numerous population of that country, and from other collateral circumstances, we may reasonably suppose, that among their other ingenious works, many of the more trifling arts, which embellish life, were cultivated by the Egyptians at an early period ; and the sacred history informs us, that the Ishmaelites and Midianites carried on a traffic with Egypt, the first foreign trade, perhaps, ever established among men.

In the tumultuous times which succeeded the patriarchal age, we find very little information concerning the state of commerce. From a general view, however, we may perceive that the mechanic arts, and various sorts of manufactures, had made a considerable progress in some countries, in times of very remote antiquity. This may be seen by considering the curious and rich materials of the tabernacle, and the high priest's garments. There is not the least doubt but the Israelites brought out of Egypt much of the knowledge they possessed in arts, sciences, and letters. Egypt had, from time immemorial, been gradually advancing in the knowledge of science and literature : and during the greatest part of the period of time now under contemplation, was celebrated for the wisdom of its legislature and civil polity, as well as for the vast extent and population of its cities, the magnificence of its edifices, and the flourishing state of its agricul-

ture. In all these respects it was distinguished above all the contemporary nations, Babylon itself not excepted. Egypt, however, was never a warlike nation ; so that seldom being in a state of hostility with its neighbours, its political history is but little connected with their's. Sesostris is the only Egyptian conqueror, of any note, whose name stands recorded in history ; and notwithstanding the fictitious, or at least very uncertain relations of some historians, we know very little of his achievements, or of the extent of his conquests ; and the descriptions of them which we find in some books, are to be esteemed little else than historical romances. The truth is, that the history of Sesostris, as well as of the other Egyptian kings, is so confused, so distorted, and exaggerated, that we can find but few well authenticated facts in the accounts of their reigns, or in the general history of Egypt, which is a tissue of allegorical stories and lying legends, invented by their priests, regulated by a fictitious chronology of their own fabrication, and transmitted to us by the Greeks ; who being naturally fond of the marvellous, and admirers of the Egyptian philosophy and history, adopted their legendary stories and ideal chronology. The ancients so often supplied the want of authentic information, relative to the transactions of remote antiquity, by calling in the assistance of a fabulous mythology, that the more we are convinced of the utility and value of history, the more we ought to stand upon our guard against

receiving, as true history, the legendary stories, fabricated by priests and politicians, in order to impose upon the minds of the vulgar.

The government of Egypt was monarchical. The long dynasty of kings, who reigned before the subversion of the monarchy by the Babylonians, is known to us by the appellation of the line of the *Pharaohs*. It is to be observed, that *Pharaoh* was not the proper name of an individual, but a title among the Egyptians, equivalent to that of king among us; so the appellations of *Pharaoh Hophni*, *Pharaoh Necho*, &c. are of the same signification as *King Necho*, *King Hophni*, &c. The Egyptian monarchy does not appear to have ever been absolute; but how far, and in what particulars, it was limited by positive regulations, we have not documents sufficiently authentic to enable us to determine; but from the general appearance of circumstances, it is reasonable to conclude, that the king, as well as the people, were directly or indirectly under the absolute control of the priests, and that those ministers of religion were in effect the absolute sovereigns of Egypt. Of this, the subjection of the kings, as well as all other deceased persons, to the judicial sentence of a tribunal, which, from an examination of their past conduct during life, determined whether the deceased person should be interred with funeral rites, or deprived of that honor, is a proof. This extraordinary tribunal was held immediately after the death of the party, and the scrutiny was

made with the most rigid punctuality; and as it determined a point of the utmost importance among the Egyptians, as well as among most of the ancients, it is no unreasonable presumption to suppose that it was invented by their priests, in order to subject the monarch, as well as the people, more absolutely to their control; as it is easy to suppose what must have been the fate of a prince who had been so unfortunate as to disoblige them; for it must be observed, that the deprivation of funeral rites, among the Egyptians, always implied an exclusion from the Elysium, where the souls of the just live through eternal ages of indescribable felicity.

The ancient state of so celebrated a country as Egypt, if it could be well ascertained, would constitute a striking feature in the general history of mankind: it is, therefore, a misfortune that so little is known of it, unless we should adopt for history the allegorical mythology and fabulous legends of its priests. We have, indeed, much more authentic information of its laws and civil polity, than of the history of their institution, or of any other transaction which took place in the kingdom. It is, however, inconsistent with our present plan to inspect them in detail. It is, notwithstanding, impossible not to remark the division of the people into distinct professions, which did not allow the son to follow any other profession, or practice any other art, than that which his father had followed. This regulation has no where been found in any country of note,

ancient or modern, except Egypt and India, which has caused many to suppose that the inhabitants of India were originally a colony from Egypt, or that the Egyptians were a colony from India. The truth of this, however, it is impossible to ascertain. The origin of nations is, for the most part, buried in impenetrable obscurity; and the migrations and intermixtures of the human species are so numerous and so diversified, that it is impossible to trace them through their different ramifications. The celebrated custom of dividing the people into distinct classes, has, however, been much applauded by some writers, and as much condemned by others. By some it has been supposed highly conducive to the perfection of arts and sciences, by bringing to the same point the accumulated experience of successive generations. If, however, it might be supposed favorable to the operations of experience, it was an insurmountable obstacle to the efforts of genius, by restraining its flight, and always confining it to the same beaten track. Besides the depression of genius, it had another evil tendency of the most serious import. So invidious a distinction contained within itself a principle of disunion, which, according to our modern ideas, might have been exceedingly dangerous, and productive of internal commotions; like the far less odious, and less marked distinction, between the patricians and plebians at Rome, in later times. And it is surprising that we have never heard of any

intestine broils, or revolts of the people, either in Egypt or India on that account; but it is to be considered, that the divisions and subdivisions of the people, being so many; balanced one another, and prevented them from becoming formidable to the government. Another important circumstance must also be taken into the account. These distinctions were sanctioned by religion, and interwoven into its very essence, in Egypt as well as in India. In this the Egyptian Priests, and the Bramins of India, have exactly hit the same mark, and met with equal success. If we would trace this system of polity to its origin and fundamental principle, there is not the least doubt but it was a device of the priests, for the purpose of securing all power and influence to themselves, by damping every effort of aspiring genius, and extinguishing every idea of ambitious enterprise among those whom they wished to retain in subjection; and also by dividing the great mass of the people into so many distinct classes, operating as checks upon one another, and prevented by the tenets of their religion from ever forming a coalition, so as to be in the least dangerous to their priestly rulers; who, it must be observed, had admitted the military order to a participation of their privileges, because they well knew, that neither such a system of government, nor any other, could be supported without an armed force; and the ascendency which religion gave them over the minds of a people nurtured in super-

stitution, furnished them with the means of causing the military to act under their direction.

Whether Assyria or Egypt was the country in which the arts and sciences were first cultivated, is a question difficult, and, indeed, at this distance of time, impossible to be determined with certainty. However, if a solution should be attempted from appearances, reasonable conjecture would, perhaps, in this respect, give the precedency to the latter. The regularity of its civil polity; the vast embankments of the Nile; the numerous canals and other admirable works for the advancement of agriculture; the magnificent remains of Egyptian architecture, which, to this very day, have braved the assaults of time; particularly the pyramids, those stupendous monuments of the rude magnificence of the primitive ages; and the superb ruins of Thebes, the most striking remains of ancient splendor that any country can boast, and of the most remote antiquity, even beyond the reach of historical record; with many other things which excite the admiration of modern travelers, as they did that of the Greek philosophers, who visited that country above two thousand years ago, all point out Egypt as the country where great things were first undertaken, and where mankind made the first progress in the arts of civilization. Egypt, by its central situation, is peculiarly adapted to the purposes of commerce and navigation. The Nile running the whole length of the country, facilitated the

means of internal trade by the easy conveyance of goods from one part to another, and could not fail of inspiring the Egyptians with ideas of the advantages of navigation; and probably they were the first people who turned their thoughts that way; although they appear to have been afterwards outdone by the Phœnicians. The Tyrians, cooped up in an island of small extent, and possessing but little on the *terra firma*, were under the necessity of supplying the local defects of their situation, so unfavorable to agriculture, by taking advantage of its aptitude for commerce, and the opulence they acquired by traffic, rendered them powerful. The Egyptians possessing a soil of the most exuberant fertility, did not make trade their principal pursuit like the Tyrians. With the latter, commerce was the primary object of attention; with the former, it was only a secondary one; consequently it is no wonder the Tyrians should excel in what was the principal object of their pursuit, the source of their opulence and power, and to which the national genius was so strongly impelled by local circumstances. So early as the reign of David, king of Israel, about 145 years after the Trojan war, and about 1048 years B.C. vast quantities of gold and silver had found their way into the countries conquered by him, which were all of them situated between the Euphrates and the Levant. There is little doubt but those metals had been brought into these countries, in such abundance, by the channels of Egyptian

and Tyrian commerce, but principally by the latter. The Tyrians traded by different routes, to India, and, no doubt, to the coast of Africa by the way of the Red Sea, which, with the Persian Gulph, formed the two great routes by which the trade to India and Africa was carried on. From the latter, ascending up the Euphrates and the Tigris, they could supply Babylon and Assyria with their various commodities; and from the Euphrates, as well as from the Red Sea, the merchandise of the East was transported over land to Tyre, and from thence again dispersed into different countries. Thus the productions of different climates were collected, interchanged, and dispersed through various channels, by Tyrian merchants. The most flourishing period of Tyrian commerce was that of the existence of the kingdom of Judah. The description of the extent and variety of that traffic, in the 27th chapter of Ezekiel, is the most curious monument of the kind any where to be met with in the writings of antiquity, as it exhibits a clear and specific representation of the commercial affairs of the most celebrated mercantile people then existing; from which we may form a more just and distinct idea of the nature and extent of the commerce carried on in the ancient world, than from any other documents now extant. Tyre, after a siege protracted by its insular situation to the length of 13 years, fell under the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar only one year before he took and destroyed Jerusa-

lem; and about one year after that memorable epoch, Egypt fell a prey to the same successful conqueror. This was the fatal blow which put an end to the splendor and opulence of the two ancient and celebrated kingdoms of Egypt and Tyre, so famous in the annals of science, civilization, and commerce. After this period, the spoils of nations and the riches of the world centered in Babylon; and after the conquest of that monarchy by Cyrus, the Persian dominions became the theatre of commerce, opulence, and luxury; Egypt, Tyre, and Babylon, being all comprised within the limits of that extensive and potent empire:

In casting a retrospective glance on a period of such remote antiquity, and of which so few historical monuments remain, we have seen the history of Egypt involved in fable, her philosophy and theology hid behind the impenetrable veil of hieroglyphical obscurity, and many of her civil and political institutions buried in oblivion. Of the Assyrians we know nothing, and very little of the Babylonians, in regard to the modes of civil and social life, or the general turn of national or popular manners. Their government was monarchical, and seems to have been despotic; their manner of living ostentatiously magnificent and luxurious; their minds addicted to superstition, and their religion a system of the grossest idolatry; we may reasonably suppose, that the idea of one Supreme, self-existent, and eternal Being, the author of

all existence, was the original and fundamental principle of the religion of the Babylonians, as well as of all other nations ; but they seem, like many others, to have in process of time, almost lost this primitive idea. The original worship of one Supreme intelligence had degenerated into Zabaism, or the worship of the celestial bodies. Mankind in every age, have been so sensible of their own weakness and unworthiness to approach the throne of the Sovereign Ruler of all, as to see the necessity of some mediator between them and that Almighty monarch, whom they supposed to be too highly exalted to regard their prayers, or pay any attention to their concerns. This supposition, with their inability to conceive either the operation of an omnipresent and all pervading spirit, or to account for the seeming discordances and mixture of evil with good, under the immediate government of such a Being, induced them to adopt the hypothesis of several subordinate deities, governing the world under the control of the Great Supreme. As none of the pagans supposed those subaltern deities to be beings of infinite perfection, the different wills and jarring passions of those subordinate rulers, might, according to the ideas of paganism, help to account for the seeming disorders which prevailed in the world. The Babylonians imagined that they saw in the heavenly bodies those subordinate and mediatorial divinities ; and they supposed each orb to be the habitation of an intelligent and powerful being,

delegated by the Supreme and Eternal Author of all things, to inspect and govern human affairs. The priests were astronomers ; they diligently observed the revolutions and various appearances of the celestial bodies, and assigned to them the government and direction of particular days in regular rotation, pretending by their various positions and configurations, to foretel future events. Thus the fallacious science of judicial astrology took its rise, in the perversion of astronomy to the purposes of priestcraft. Babylon was the cradle of astrology, from whence it passed into Egypt. Some rather suppose that it originated in the latter country, and from thence was introduced into Chaldæa. Which of these two suppositions is right, is a question which cannot be determined. The former opinion, however, is the most probable. But it is certain, that in an early period it existed in both countries ; and it is not a little surprising, that so fallacious a science became so universal almost throughout the world, and that it attracted so much the attention, and influenced so powerfully the hopes and fears of mankind, in almost every age and every country, under almost every political and religious system, although discountenanced and condemned by the doctrines of christianity. Even at this very day numbers of the vulgar, in every country of Europe, are strongly persuaded of the possibility of foretelling future events, by the configurations of the planets. This can only be

accounted for by considering the prying curiosity of man, ever desirous of enquiring into his future destiny. Of late, sound philosophy, and just ideas of astronomical subjects, have exploded the absurdities and inconsistencies of judicial astrology; and yet there are some who would gladly revive that pretended science, and restore it to its former credit, by attributing to the planets an influence over physical and moral events, by the operation of natural causes. But sound philosophy and uniform experience concur to shew, that in the system of nature every thing is influenced by causes placed within a certain degree of approximation, and not by causes so exceedingly remote; and an accurate knowledge of astronomy has ascertained the distance of the celestial bodies to be such, as leaves no room to suppose that they can have any considerable influence on physical, and much less on moral circumstances, in our world, either in regard to nations or individuals. Supposing the reality of a planetary influence on the affairs of nations and communities, it would be necessary, in order to determine its nature and extent, that we should be in possession of a correct and well authenticated astrological history of the world; but no such work is any where to be met with; and if the effects of this influence on the affairs of nations and collective bodies of men could be ascertained, it would still be impossible to determine in what manner individuals might be implicated in them. When we

contemplate the direful effects of public calamities, of plagues and earthquakes, or the destruction of the human species, in battles or sieges, where thousands fall in one day, it requires a degree of credulity, very little consistent with either philosophy or reason, to imagine that so many individuals of different ages, collected out of different countries, and involved in one general misfortune, were born under the same planetary influence, and that their fate was determined by the same configurations of the celestial bodies. A pretended skill in this imaginary science, has, however, notwithstanding its incompatibility with the dictates of reason, and the principles of true philosophy, been an useful instrument in the hands of impostors, in every age, and in every country, for the purpose of turning to their own advantage the ignorance and credulity of the vulgar; as it was among the Babylonian priests, whose religion, like that of the Egyptians, appears to have been an intricate and mysterious juggle, calculated for the acquisition of wealth and power, and for obtaining an unlimited ascendancy over the minds of the people.

The history of mankind does not afford a more striking instance of the extensive and lasting effects of established systems and generally received opinions, on the operations of the human intellect, than this remarkable prepossession in favour of judicial astrology, which, probably, would never have been thought of, had

it not been invented by the priests of Babylon, with whose theological system it was essentially interwoven, and by whose sanction and authority it was brought into credit among a credulous and superstitious people, with whose philosophical and religious ideas it was perfectly consistent.

At a very early period, astrology had spread from Babylon into all the eastern countries, and, in process of time, throughout the whole civilized world. The establishment of christianity diminished its credit, but did not extirpate it with the other numerous superstitions of paganism. Although the christian religion condemned the study of this ideal and fallacious science, it gained ground in such a manner, that it was held at last in almost as high estimation, among christians, as it had been among pagans; and was not exploded even among persons of no inconsiderable literary attainments before the commencement, or rather the middle, of the sixteenth century; and even at this time a large proportion of the common people of this christian country, sincerely believe that the book of fate may be unsealed by the study of judicial astrology. That an imaginary science, originating from an erroneous and absurd hypothesis, fabricated by the Babylonian priests, should have had so extensive a spread, and so universal an influence over the minds of men, is a remarkable and striking circumstance in the history of the human intellect.

The Zabiap, or Babylonian religion, which, according to Dr. Russel, and other accurate investigators of antiquity, consisted principally in the adoration of the celestial orbs, as the visible deities, who, as they imagined, ruled the world in subordination to the sovereign will of one Eternal, Infinite, and All-pervading Spirit, degenerated by degrees into the worship of images, erected as symbols and representatives of those celestial divinities. However, St. Jerome, and others, supposes that idolatry, or the worship of images, took its rise from the erection of statues to the honour of kings and heroes, which, in process of time, became the objects of this adoration; and assert, that the statue of Belus, the successor of Nimrod, and king of Babylon, was the first object of this kind of worship. Perhaps both these circumstances might concur to produce this effect; it cannot be supposed that things of such remote antiquity are capable of being fully ascertained.

From the time of the foundation of Babylon and Nineveh, history leaves us almost as much in the dark, concerning the political occurrences which took place in the ancient empire of the Assyrians, as it does in regard to their laws, institutions, and manners, until the extinction of that empire by the revolt of the governors of Media and Babylon, and the death of Sardanapalus. What is told us of Belus, Ninus, and Semiramis, is so ill authenticated, that nothing like genuine information can be collected from it:

and even after that event, the history of those nations is so confused, that it cannot be relied on. It would be an endless, as well as a useless task, to attempt to reconcile the discordances of historians and chronologers relative to the succession and reigns of the kings of Babylon, both before and after Nebuchadnezzar. Each different writer has framed an hypothesis of his own, and laboured to support it; and modern chronologers have often employed a great deal of laborious research, in order to collect something like truth from their contradictory accounts. However, after perusing all the relations of the ancients, and the researches of the moderns, we only know, that after the death of Sardanapalus, the empire of the Assyrians and Babylonians, which is always accounted the same, was sometimes united, and sometimes divided, until the city of Nineveh was, by reason of its revolt, entirely destroyed, in the manner so pathetically described by the prophet Nahum, of which transaction we have no particulars in history, and consequently can form no idea of it, but from the striking and highly-coloured picture given by the prophet. Of the victorious and splendid reign of Nebuchadnezzar, we have no succinct and coherent account, but are obliged to collect the transactions from fragments of sacred and profane history; and yet, of all the Babylonian kings, he is the only one of whom we have any knowledge on which we can depend.

Of the genius and national manners of the Babylonians, we may, perhaps, form some toler-

rably just idea from the observation of well known and obvious circumstances. They had certainly made no inconsiderable progress in the sciences; but their minds were, in the highest degree, tinctured with superstition, which their religion was calculated to inspire and to cherish. Of this, their cultivation of astrology; and all the other arts of divination, with an assiduity and attachment beyond any example to be met with in the history of other nations of antiquity, is an incontestible proof. Their astronomers had made a considerable progress in this science, and had discovered and ascertained the revolutions of the celestial orbs, so far as to be able to calculate the eclipses. Some of the first Greek philosophers travelled to Babylon for information relative to astronomy and other branches of knowledge; and, in this respect, Babylon claims a share with Egypt of the honour of having instructed Greece. The uniform and extensive plain in which Babylon was situated, and the clearness of the atmosphere during a great part of the year, was a considerable advantage to the Chaldæan astronomers. The Egyptians possessed the advantages of an unclouded atmosphere, in an equal, or, perhaps, a superior degree; but the plains of Egypt not being in every direction so extensive as those of Chaldæa, did not display so wide an horizon nor had the Egyptians, or indeed any other nation ancient or modern, an observatory of so stupendous an altitude as the great tower of the temple of Belus. Some writers tell us,

that the perpendicular height of this prodigious structure was not less than one mile ; but who believes it ? That elegant and ingenious writer, Dr. Russel (who has collected and accurately examined the descriptions given of it by those ancient authors, who had seen it, and carefully informed themselves of its dimensions) says, that the temple was a complete square, each of whose sides was 1200 feet. By this description we must suppose he means, that the temple was of a cubical form, otherwise his description is not clear, by leaving the height undetermined. From the middle of this edifice the tower rose 600 feet square, and as many high. On the top of this tower, which according to this computation of its altitude, the most moderate that has ever been made, arose to the enormous height of 1800 feet, the celebrated Babylonian observatory was placed, where the priests made their astronomical observations. From this stupendous elevation the astronomer saw the earth and the heavens displayed in one wide and uninterrupted view, which, according to mathematical calculation, allowing for the curvature of the earth's convex surface, could not extend to a less distance, over that uniform and level country, than 50 miles every way from the place of observation,* and must consequently have taken

* This supposed estimate of the extent of the prospect seen from the Babylonian observatory, on the top of the tower of Belus, is founded on mathematical principles. The method of discovering at what distance the regular curvature of the earth's surface permits objects to be seen upon it, from any given height, or, *vice versé*, is this :—To the earth's diameter add the height of

in considerably more than the whole tract inclosed within the different branches of the Euphrates and the Tygris. Above and beneath, the vast expanse presented a magnificent and extensive prospect, calculated to fill the mind of the spectator with the most awful and exalted idea of the grandeur of the universe, while it afforded the Babylonian astronomers an opportunity of observing the courses of the celestial orbs, for a long space of time, in their passage from the eastern to the western edge of so wide an horizon. The prodigious height of this tower, although attested by all historians and ancient travellers, seem almost to stagger the credulity of modern times. However, if it was not quite so high as it has been generally represented by ancient writers, it must have been of an extraordinary and stupendous altitude to authorize such bold exaggerations; for no traveller would have ventured to give it such an almost incredible elevation, had not its height

the eye, multiply the sum by that height; then the square root of the product gives the distance sought. In the present case thus:--

Diameter of the earth, in feet, according to Sir Isaac Newton, } Height of the observatory,

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1800=75239850600,

and $75239850600=274298$ feet= 51 miles, 7 fur. $13\frac{1}{2}$ yards, 2 feet.

This method is useful at sea, to discover the distance of any object of a known height, as soon as it appears in the horizon. And although no part of the land is supposed to present a surface so uniformly level as an expanse of water, yet, in so flat a country as the environs of Babylon, and the whole province of Chaldaea, it cannot be far from the truth.

been in reality such as to astonish the spectators.

The genius of the Babylonians, as far as we can judge of it from known circumstances, appears to have been inclined to superstition, and their system of religion tended to encourage and strengthen that turn of mind. The great number of their astrologers, soothsayers, diviners, &c. however, shews their intellectual faculties to have been active, and their minds full of curiosity and the spirit of enquiry. History does not, with any degree of precision, inform us how far they carried their attainments in astronomy, the study to which they were most addicted. Their proficiency, however, was such as to enable them to calculate eclipses, and to attract the Greeks to Babylon for the acquisition of astronomical knowledge. They seem, upon the whole, to have been a people addicted to the pursuit of knowledge, although, like the Egyptians, and other nations of antiquity, they formed many vague and absurd ideas and opinions. Their taste seems to have been turned to ostentatious splendor in their appearance, and bulky magnificence in their architecture, as may be conjectured not only from that prodigious structure, the temple of Belus, but also from the extent of the royal palace, and the vast circuit and bulk of the walls of the city. The plan, the fortification, and embellishments of Babylon, do honor to the authors of them, whoever they were, and give us an exalted idea of the power and great-

ness of a people that executed works of such prodigious magnitude. We cannot but observe how much the writers, who have transmitted to us a description of this ancient and celebrated city, disagree among themselves in regard to its extent and the height of its walls; and their relations concerning those particulars may be considered as striking instances of the uncertainty of history, in regard to circumstantial details. Diod. Siculus says, the walls of Babylon were 45 miles in circuit. Clitarchus describes them as 365 feet high, and fortified with 150 towers. Strabo tells us, that their circuit was 48 miles. Quintus Curtius says, their height was 150 feet, thickness 32 feet, and circuit 46 miles. Herodotus asserts their height to have been 300 feet, their thickness 75 feet, and their circuit 60 miles; and although the last mentioned author is almost universally accused of exaggeration, and a proneness to fiction, not only in this description, but in many others of his narratives, the ingenious Dr. Russel seems inclined to give the preference to his description, because, of all the authors who have written on this subject, he alone had seen Babylon in the zenith of its splendor and magnificence. It is, however, impossible to reconcile those defective and disagreeing accounts, but from them, taken collectively, we may discover that the city was of an immense extent, and the walls of an astonishing height and thickness. As to the different accounts of the height of those celebrated

walls, we must remember, that Darius Hystaspes is said to have reduced it to the half of what it had formerly been, in consequence of the revolt of the city against the Persian government; so that the descriptions given by those who visited Babylon before and after that event, must in consequence be very different. And M. D'Anville, who is called by many, and especially by Mr. Gibbon, the prince of geographers, says, that when the ancient texts, which describe the extent of Babylon and of Thebes, in Egypt, are settled, the exaggerations reduced, and the measures ascertained, it will be found that those famous cities filled the great, but not incredible extent of 25 or 30 miles; an hypothesis widely different from what has commonly been believed. *Mem. de l'Academie, &c.* Thus, from the concurrent testimony of all ancient historians, and their modern commentators, although widely disagreeing in regard to particulars, we may conclude that Babylon far surpassed in extent the largest of our European cities; and in that particular, as its form was nearly square, it was equal to any two of them; but as the houses were not contiguous, and the streets wide and far asunder, forming by their intersections large squares of garden, and arable and meadow ground, it cannot be supposed to have been nearly equal to either London or Paris in population. The plan, whether it had been the effect of sagacious design, or of caprice, was grand, beautiful, and useful, and equally conducive to

the security, the pleasure, and the health of the inhabitants. The Babylonian monarchs, desirous of rendering their capital impregnable to every mode of attack, at that time known or thought of, had surrounded it with walls of an immense height and thickness, and ditches of a proportionable width and depth, constantly supplied with water by the Euphrates, which ran through the middle of the city. The streets were laid out in right lines, the whole length and breadth of the city, crossing one another at right angles; so that, from every intersection, four gates of the city might be seen, every street forming a most magnificent vista, very unlike the narrow and crooked streets of our European cities. The vast extent of the place admitted large squares of garden and arable land between the intersecting streets, so that every house might have a small field behind it. This contrivance contributed exceedingly to render the city proof against the assaults of famine, if it was blockaded and its supplies intercepted, as its impregnable walls and unfordable ditches rendered it invulnerable against the assaults of an enemy. Another circumstance of exceeding great utility and advantage, which has not been generally remarked, was involved in this plan. It was in a particular manner adapted to the local circumstances of the situation and the nature of the climate; for if such a city, surrounded with walls of so prodigious a height, situated in so sultry a climate, and so humid a

soil, in the midst of so low and level a country, had been close-crowded into narrow compass, like our modern cities, it would have been a mere sink of pestilential contagion. The height of the walls would have prevented the circulation of the air from the open country, and have rendered the atmosphere of the city in the highest degree noxious and fatal to its inhabitants; all which pernicious effects were obviated by the open and rural plan on which it was constructed, and in which we cannot but remark, that the great purposes of magnificence, strength, and salubrity, were judiciously combined; a circumstance which must attract our attention, and excite our admiration, in contemplating the transactions of so early a period.

Nebuchadnezzar, undoubtedly, expecting no less than to establish a monarchy as durable as the world itself, completed the fortifications and embellishments of the city. All his vast projects, however, were soon brought to nothing, by that Providence which rules and governs all, and can, at any time, confound the wisdom of the wise; arranging, with a prescience unsearchable, that uninterrupted train of causes and effects which determines the success of all human projects. The wealth and power of the Babylonians soon produced a careless security, joined to the most extravagant luxury. Masters of the best part of the world, the Babylonian kings, successors of the great Nebuchadnezzar, instead of following his example, and pursuing the same

vigorous measures, addicted themselves to indolence and luxurious effeminacy. They paid no attention to political or military affairs, and a total relaxation of discipline introduced itself into the army. The Babylonian troops, who, under Nebuchadnezzar, had appeared irresistible, were so degenerated, that in the war against the Medes and Persians, they were unable to face the enemy in the field, and experienced a continued succession of defeats. History affords but little information that can be relied on concerning the immediate causes and particular transactions of that war. All we can collect on the subject is, that the Babylonians, almost constantly defeated, having seen the subjugation of all their vast dominions, were at length obliged to shut themselves up in the capital, where the whole remaining force of their empire being concentrated, they supposed that the height and strength of their walls would ensure their safety against all the assaults of the enemy, while their vast magazines, with the resources afforded by the fields and gardens within the city, would enable them to bid defiance to all the attacks of famine. The court, lulled into a fatal security, and immersed in sensual luxury, took little precaution for defence. The Dowager Queen had the administration of the kingdom, and Belshazzar, the reigning king, was a stranger to state affairs. Things being in this situation, Cyrus was informed, that on a certain approaching festival, the whole city would be plunged in the most

riotous scenes of drunkenness and debauchery. On receiving this intelligence he formed the project of cutting the banks of the Euphrates, a little above the city, and turning its current into the vast reservoirs which Nebuchadnezzar had made for the purpose of receiving the superabundant waters of that river, which, in the times of great floods, brought down such a quantity of water from the mountains of Media and Armenia, as used to inundate the country, and sometimes the city itself. Having carried this plan into execution in the evening preceding the festival, the river was quickly dried, and he marched his troops up the channel directly into the city, and either finding the brazen gates descending to the river open, or else forcing them, he entered the city without opposition, and found the inhabitants, the soldiery, and the court, engaged in scenes of debauchery and intemperance. Then advancing to the royal palace, he soon forced an entrance, and put the king and all his courtiers to the sword, in the midst of their drunken revels. Thus fell Babylon, the most celebrated city of the ancient world, B. C. 538, in the reign of Servius Tullius, king of Rome; an event which constituted the first great revolution and transfer of power and property among mankind; for the Assyrian and Babylonian monarchies are always accounted the same; the latter being only a continuation of the former, under a different dynasty of princes.

During the period of time in which the banks

of the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates were the grand theatre of human action, and the countries where civilization, science, and luxury had principally made their appearance, all Europe, except Greece, was buried in savage ignorance, without the knowledge of any of the arts or conveniences of civilized society. Of all the Europeans the Greeks were the only people who had begun to emerge from barbarism. As early as the age of Moses, the Greeks had begun to strike out the rude outlines of government and civil polity; and during the period which elapsed between the egress of the Israelites out of Egypt, and the establishment of the monarchy in the house of David, their different kingdoms and states had assumed a regular and systematical appearance; and from that time to the æra marked by the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, they had made gradual advances in science and civilization. It was not, however, until nearly the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, that the Greek philosophers, travelling into Egypt and Chaldæa, began to import into their own country the learning of foreign nations; and this may be fixed as the epoch of Grecian philosophy. This memorable æra is marked by such a constellation of great and illustrious characters as no preceding age perhaps could boast; for Nebuchadnezzar, who may, without any impropriety, be called the founder of the Babylonian monarchy, and was in the strictest sense the author of its greatness, was

contemporary with Cyrus, who overthrew that splendid political structure, and founded the Persian empire upon its ruins, Cyrus, according to the most approved chronology, being born in the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, B. C. 600. In this age Perander ruled at Corinth, and Pisistratus in Athens; Solon also, and Daniel, as well as the philosophers Anaximander and Pythagoras were contemporary with the above-mentioned conspicuous political characters. While Greece was making considerable advances in science and legislation, a nation was formed in Italy, which was designed by Providence to bear rule over the whole civilized part of mankind. Rome, the destined mistress of the world, was founded by Romulus, in the reign of Achaz, or Ahaz, king of Judah, B. C. 752, and 148 years before the commencement of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, according to the most generally received systems of chronology. We are not, however, to suppose those computations relative to the events of a remote and obscure antiquity to be exactly ascertained; we can only regard them as approximations to truth; but anachronisms of a few years are of little importance in a view of ancient history, where historians and chronologers themselves, after the most laborious researches, cannot agree.

The city of Rome, when newly built on the Palatine Mount, contained about a thousand houses or huts, built of mud, and thatched with reeds; and the palace of its king was of the

same materials. The number of its inhabitants, who were able to bear arms, were about three thousand; and the whole Roman territory was about eight miles across. The inhabitants consisted of lawless vagabonds, debtors, outlaws, and malefactors, collected together by its warlike and savage founder; and, in order to increase the number of citizens, it was made a sanctuary for all persons of a similar description. From so despicable a beginning arose the greatest and most powerful empire the world has ever seen.

Among the savage citizens of infant Rome, we cannot, however, but observe a steady and prudent disposition of mind, as well as a warlike and enterprising genius. Wise laws were enacted, and prudent regulations, suitable to a newly formed state, were adopted in the reign of Romulus. Numa Pompilius, his successor, and second king of Rome, was a lover of peace; and in his long and peaceful reign he regulated, with the most minute exactness and attention, the civil and religious institutions of the Romans; so that he may, with the greatest propriety, be called the author of their religion and laws. Romulus was the David, and Numa the Solomon of the Romans. The general aspect of the world, at the close of the period which we have been contemplating was this: the Persian empire, founded on the ruins of the Babylonian greatness, uniting the richest, the most populous, and best cultivated parts of the world under its dominions; the Greek republics consi-

derably advanced in the knowledge of legislature, civil government, and the military art: Rome, in its infancy, under a regal government, but as yet scarcely emerged from barbarism, little known, and holding no conspicuous rank in the scale of nations; and all the rest of Europe in a state similar to that of the savage tribes of America, when first discovered by the Spaniards.

Having endeavoured to display as distinct a view of this long and dark period of history, which may properly be called the infancy of science and civilization, as the obscurity of the subject permits, I beg leave to subscribe myself with sincere esteem and profound respect,

Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER X.

SIR,

WE now begin to have a view of a more interesting, as well as a more luminous period, commencing and ending with the Persian empire, and affording ample matter of speculation to a curious observer of events.

Persia, from an obscure and dependent kingdom, exalted upon the ruins of the Babylonian empire to the highest pitch of opulence, power, and splendor, soon began to deviate from the vigorous plan of administration of the great Cyrus. Her monarchs, placed on the summit of human greatness, degenerated from the virtues which

had raised their victorious ancestor to the throne, and adopted the pride, the pomp, the ostentatious pageantry, and effeminating luxury of the Babylonian monarchs, which had caused the downfall of their power, the subversion of their empire, and the extinction of their race. This awful lesson had no effect on the Persian kings; Persia keeping up her splendor, declined in power. The administration grew corrupt, the government feeble and inefficacious, and the military discipline relaxed and neglected. The monarch, generally a stranger to public affairs, and the monarchy resting more on its ancient fame than on its present power, while the rival and hostile Greeks, daily improving in arts and arms, began openly to bid defiance to the power of the great King, and his numerous but undisciplined armies. Some of the Persian monarchs, it is true, seemed to awake from their lethargy, and shew a spirit of enterprise, which, for a moment, promised the revival of their glory and the re-establishment of their declining power; but these attempts were no more than transient exertions, the efforts of expiring strength. Darius Hystaspes was the first monarch of Persia who undertook a war against the Greeks; but the bloody plains of Marathon taught him how to appreciate the courage, the discipline, and military skill of his European enemies; and after a disgraceful termination of a war marked with defeat and disaster on the part of the Persians, that prince, with his crown, bequeathed to his successor, Xerxes, his animosity against Greece,

and his desire of effacing the disgrace of Persia. Xerxes caused the trumpet of war to sound through every province of his vast dominions, and after extraordinary preparations, attacked Greece, B. C. 481, with the most formidable armament mentioned in history. Herodotus estimates the force of Xerxes at one million seven hundred thousand foot, and eighty thousand horse. Trogus gives the number at only one million foot, and eighty thousand horse. The number of galleys is rated at two thousand two hundred and eight, and the transport vessels at three thousand. Historians, however, disagree very much in regard to the number of the Persian troops, as they do upon every other subject whenever they pretend to give an exact account of number, and other minute particulars, which they take for the most part from common report, and not from correct information. Their disagreement respecting this great and important transaction, is only similar to innumerable other instances of historical uncertainty, in regard to circumstantial minutiae, with which it is almost morally impossible that the historian should be perfectly acquainted; and it ought to operate as a caution against too easy a credulity, when we find them pretending to tell what it is evident that they cannot possibly know.

Notwithstanding those unavoidable errors and discordances, there is, however, no reason to doubt of this armament having been the most formidable the world has ever seen; and it evi-

dently displays the vast resources of the Persian empire, and its irresistible power, if those resources had been well managed: but numbers could not supply the want of courage, military discipline, and patriotism. Greece was at that time an assemblage of independent and often hostile states; but foreign invasion impelled them to adopt unanimous councils, and to take decisive measures. The Greeks, setting aside all subjects of discontent and animosity among themselves, made the common interest the common-cause. All the different states, except the Thebans, who were invariably attached to the Persian interest, entered into a confederacy, founded upon their common interest in repelling a foreign invasion, which threatened nothing less than subjugation and servitude to Greece.

Historians pretend not only to detail the most minute particulars of this grand contest, but also to amuse us with circumstantial narratives of the debates which took place in the councils of war, held both among the Greeks and Persians; the particular opinions of Mardonius, nephew of Xerxes, and commander of the land forces, of Artabazus and of Xerxes himself, and the arguments used by them for and against undertaking this grand expedition; with many other minute particulars, which we may consider as embellishments of history, but can hardly esteem them real narratives of facts, unless historians had condescended to inform us by what means they had obtained the knowledge of what passed in those military councils of the Greek and

Persian commanders. Regarding, however, circumstantial details merely as historical ornaments, the real authentic relation of this memorable expedition merits, in an eminent degree, the remembrance and attention of posterity. The Persian king, with his innumerable multitudes, passed the Hellespont out of Asia into Europe. The Greeks were obliged to retreat before an army which seemed irresistible; but the gallant and almost unparalleled defence of the straits of Thermopylæ, a narrow defile among the mountains of Thessaly, by Leonidas and his Spartans, gave the Persians a formidable specimen of Grecian valour and discipline. The Spartan king, with his valiant detachment, having fallen overpowered with numbers in that ever-memorable action, the Persians gained an unobstructed entrance into the interior of Greece; and the Athenians, unable to defend their city retired to their ships. Xerxes advancing with his enormous army, plundered and destroyed the country in the most deplorable manner, levelled with the ground the temples of the gods of Greece, and burnt Athens in the sight of its terrified citizens, who, from their ships, were indignant spectators of the flames which reduced their city to ashes, and involved their temples and all their possessions in one general conflagration. The Persian fleet at the same time advanced, but was totally defeated by the Greeks, who, afterwards ventured to attack the Persians by land. The fortune of the war was then changed. The Persians defeated, harassed, and dis-

heartened, began to retreat. The Greeks, on this occasion, adopted a plan worthy to serve as a lesson to every nation in similar circumstances. Instead of cutting off the retreat of the terrified enemy, which they might easily have done, they gave him every opportunity of effecting it. They wisely considered, that such a numerous host of armed foes, shut up in their country, without a possibility of retreating, might, through necessity, adopt vigorous measures and grow courageous through despair; and, indeed, before such a number of enemies could have been cut off or subdued, the whole country must have been rendered an entire scene of slaughter and desolation. If they had even surrendered prisoners, their numbers were sufficient to produce a famine in a country of so inconsiderable an extent as Greece. Through these considerations the Greeks contrived to spread a rumour in the enemy's camp, that they had resolved to destroy the bridge of boats which the Persians had laid over the Hellespont, a measure which they never intended to take. It is even said, that Themistocles, commander of the Athenian fleet, gave private information of this determination to the Persian King, under colour of friendship. The consequence, however, was, that Xerxes, panic-struck, immediately retreated; and having left an army of 400,000 men, under the command of Mardonius, he himself, with the rest of his forces, crossed the Hellespont into Asia. Mardonius

was totally defeated the next campaign by the Greeks, himself slain, and his numerous army, which was apparently fully sufficient for the conquest of all Greece, was almost entirely annihilated. In this manner, the most powerful armament ever fitted out by any nation, experienced nothing but defeat and disgrace. This memorable expedition deservedly makes a conspicuous figure in history, and is worthy of particular remark. It exhibits a warlike and patriotic people, repelling a most formidable invasion made by an enemy, whose numbers and resources were in more than a tenfold proportion superior to their's, and shews, in the most striking point of view, the contrast between patriotism and military discipline on the one side, and luxury, effeminacy, and mismanagement on the other. The succeeding wars between Greece and Persia were carried on with various success ; but, upon the whole, in a manner favourable to the Greeks. The Persians soon found them terrible and dangerous enemies, and considered them as the aspiring rivals of their power. The Persian monarchs, after this, adopted the policy of turning the arms of the Greek republics one against another, by a seasonable distribution of bribes, among the most active chiefs and persons of the greatest power and influence ; and Persian gold, during a long time, agitated Greece with intestine wars and commotions. At length a period arrived, in which the affairs of Greece took a turn, which proved equally fatal to the liberties of that

country, and the existence of the Persian monarchy. Philip, king of Macedonia, a small and hitherto unnoticed kingdom, had in his youth been an hostage among the Thebans, and in that situation had received an education suitable to his rank. He had studied philosophy and rhetoric under the ablest masters, and had been trained to arms under the great Epaminondas. Being endowed by nature with a great and aspiring genius, and an excellent understanding, he had profited in a supereminent degree by the instructions of those great men; and coming to the throne of Macedonia, with these personal advantages, he soon began to form the most extensive plans for aggrandizing his power. By a train of the most profound and successful politics he procured himself to be recognized a member of the Amphyctionic council, or general assembly of the Greeks, which seems to have resembled the Diets of the German empire. Having gained that point, he soon afterwards by his arms and his intrigues, obtained a decided ascendancy over the different Grecian states; and by artfully bribing the leading members, and employing every engine of force and fraud, subjected them entirely to his dominion, so that, although they still retained the name of republics, Philip was, in effect, sovereign of Greece. The reign of Philip is remarkable, and the transactions which took place in it are curious and interesting; but, however splendid his political and military talents may appear,

his moral character is detestable. We see in this prince the most shining abilities converted to the worst of purposes. He was not only a philosopher, but also a consummate orator; and, beyond all manner of doubt, one of the greatest politicians and generals that any age has ever produced. All these brilliant accomplishments he employed for the aggrandizement of his own power, at the expence of the liberties of his neighbours; and his whole life exhibits a complete specimen of unconscientious policy and unprincipled conduct. The most laudable feature of Philip's character, was his love of literature; and the most commendable action of his life, was the great care he took of the education of his son Alexander. He made choice of an elegant palace, in a retired situation, as the most proper for that purpose, and engaged the great Aristotle to be his preceptor in philosophy and literature, while he himself trained him to arms under his own invincible banners. If the life of Philip be worthy of the attention of the historical student, his death is not less interesting and remarkable. It affords a most striking instance of the instability of all human power, and of the uncertainty of all human projects. Philip had resolved on the invasion of the Persian empire, with the whole confederate force of Greece and Macedonia; a measure extremely popular among the Greeks, who were elated with the hopes of retaliating upon that empire the evils they had suffered from the invasion of Xerxes. He accordingly

summoned the general council of the Grecian states. The quota to be furnished by each state was determined, and Philip being declared generalissimo of the confederate Greeks, exerted himself with extraordinary activity and diligence in making the most formidable preparations for that great expedition. His whole army was in readiness to cross the Hellespont, in the most perfect state of military discipline and equipment, and nothing appeared to delay his entering on the important contest which was to decide the fate of Greece and Persia. In this promising situation of affairs, so flattering to his ambition, Philip resolved to display his pomp and splendor before the assembled Greeks in solemnizing the nuptials of his daughter; but how uncertain is all terrestrial power and grandeur! in the midst of the most brilliant spectacle that Greece had ever beheld, surrounded by his guards and the principal officers of the Grecian states, who were paying him little less than divine honours, Philip was stabbed to the heart by a desperate assassin, and immediately expired, burying in the grave with himself all his flattering prospects of universal monarchy, and leaving his grand expedition against the Persian empire to be carried into execution by Alexander, his son and successor. Thus ended the important reign of Philip, king of Macedonia, whose extensive plans, joined to his extraordinary abilities in the cabinet and the field, introduced the greatest change of affairs the world had at that time ever expe-

rienced. His projects were carried into effect by Alexander, his son, in the manner, with which every one is acquainted. This Prince, in about twelve years, had conquered the Persian empire, and made that celebrated inroad into India, so much spoken of by historians, and after returning from that famous expedition, died at Babylon, in the thirty-third or thirty-fourth year of his age. B. C. 324. The fortune and successes of Alexander had been most brilliant of any recorded in history, and his reign constitutes a most remarkable epoch in human affairs, having displayed a new scene of things, and produced an extraordinary and important change in the political aspect of the world. The subversion of the Persian empire by Alexander and his Greeks, develops a train of causes and effects extremely worthy the attention of the historian, the politician, and the philosopher. The whole scene of the wars between Greece and Persia is of a more interesting nature than any other wars which had happened before that time. During the whole period which had elapsed between the first invasion of Greece, by Darius Hystaspes, and the extinction of the Persian monarchy, which took place on the defeat and death of Darius Codomanus, B. C. 330, we see the contrast between a rising and a falling people; between a nation weak in resources, but warlike, active, and enterprising, and a nation numerous and opulent, possessing vast resources, but, luxurious and effeminate; whose power was apparent rather than real, whose numerous armies

kept up a fallacious appearance of military strength, and the ostentatious parade of whose court dazzled the eyes of the neighbouring nations with a false show of power. The object of those wars was in the highest degree important and interesting. Asia had till then been the theatre of all the great transactions which had taken place among men; and, together with Egypt, had been the seat of arts and sciences, of literature and commerce, and the only quarter of the globe where extensive political plans had been formed, and powerful kingdoms established. Europe had till that time been unnoticed, but was now just emerging from barbarity. Greece had received from Egypt and Babylon the rudiments of civilization, and acquired some knowledge of the sciences. Her active, ingenious, and enterprising inhabitants, had established colonies in Italy, Spain, and the southern coast of Gaul, as well as in the islands of the Mediterranean, and begun to extend their commerce, as well as to improve their philosophy and literature. These circumstances the Greeks had, by their active and enterprising genius, turned to such advantage, as soon to become the rivals of that potent empire, which ruled all the then known parts of Asia. The wars between the Greeks and Persians were to decide the grand point, whether Asia or Europe should have the ascendancy. After a long contest, the balance turned in favour of Europe, which then gained a superiority over Asia, and has maintained it to

this day. This grand and decisive contest was, therefore, of greater importance in every political and moral point of view, and involved consequences of greater magnitude and interest than any which had preceded it. Alexander's expedition against the Persian empire is the most celebrated military enterprize recorded in history, and its success the most brilliant. It effected the second great revolution of power; that has marked the history of mankind, and has conferred on Alexander the unquestionable title of the greatest and most successful conqueror the world has ever seen; whether he can claim the appellation of the consummate politician and general is somewhat more problematical. His abilities in these respects, have, notwithstanding the brilliancy of his successful career, which has so much dazzled the eyes of posterity, been variously estimated and represented. By some he has been called a madman, by others a hero. Some have admitted his magnanimity and heroism, and esteemed him the greatest of warriors, while others have represented him as a plunderer of nations and a destroyer of mankind. In appreciating his character, a just medium, however, ought to be observed. In his invasion of Asia he most certainly had a better pretext than the generality of those who, at different times, have made hostile aggressions on their neighbours. If the affair be considered in a national point of view, it was the most popular enterprize that could have been entered on, as it perfectly coin-

cided with the sentiments of resentment entertained by the Greeks on account of the insults and injuries they had repeatedly suffered from the Persians. In regard to the situation in which Alexander was placed, it was certainly such as imposed on him the necessity of undertaking the war, unless he had resolved to forfeit the esteem of his subjects, the confederate Greeks and Macedonians. His father, Philip, had projected the enterprize, and made all the necessary preparations for carrying it into execution. He had trained an army, superior in military skill and discipline to any the world had ever seen; and Alexander had scarcely any thing left to do, but to put himself at its head, and lead it to victory and conquest. In that situation he was under an almost absolute necessity of executing an enterprize which Philip had concerted; for which he had made every adequate preparation, and which, if death had not frustrated his aspiring views, he would undoubtedly have carried into full effect. In such circumstances Alexander could not have desisted from the undertaking, without exhibiting himself an example of pusillanimity to his own and all future ages; and consequently, in his attack on Persia, he must stand justified, or at least excused, in the mind of every one who knows how to observe and reflect, as he did no more than what every man of an ordinary share of courage must, in such circumstances, have found himself compelled to do. His subsequent conduct, on many occasions,

both during the course of that war and in his other enterprizes, was such, however, as cannot be ascribed to any other principle than an overbearing ambition, and an enthusiastic love of fame, and would have been stigmatized by posterity with the name of extravagant rashness, if success had not stamped upon it the title of magnanimity. The circumstances, however, which imposed upon Alexander the necessity of being a conqueror, tend very much to diminish, or at least to obscure, his reputation as a general in the eyes of an intelligent observer. Philip had concerted his plans in such a manner, had trained such an army, and had made such preparations, as could hardly fail of ensuring success. Some writers of that age say, that every private soldier in the army was qualified to be an officer, and that every officer possessed military skill sufficient for a commander in chief. In such general assertions it is proper to make some abatement; it was customary among the Greeks to exaggerate. However, when every allowance is made for such exaggerations, it is certain that the bulk of Alexander's army was composed of veterans, trained to arms by that great master of tactics and military discipline, King Philip, who had formed the impenetrable Macedonian phalanx in such a manner, that it was almost impossible to break its closely compacted ranks. His success, therefore, is not to be wondered at, leading such an army against a luxurious, effeminate, and unwarlike enemy; whose forces,

though numerous, were ill commanded and undisciplined. If Alexander had not been at the head of such an army, and assisted by the counsels and exertions of such commanders as Parmenio, Lysimachus, Antigonus, Perdiccas, Craterus, Ptolemy, and others; or if he had turned his arms westward against the warlike Romans, instead of the effeminate Persians, his affairs would, in all probability, have assumed a very different aspect, and he would scarcely have shined in the page of history as the invincible conqueror. But every observing and intelligent reader of history cannot but see, that in this war the circumstances of the two belligerent nations, and the state of their armies were such, that a general of ordinary abilities in Alexander's place, could hardly have failed of success. Possessing all the advantages of an excellent literary and military education, and endowed by nature with courage, magnanimity, and genius, Alexander appears to have been capable of the greatest things; but we can only estimate his political and military character by what he actually performed; and in this estimation we must allow, that every circumstance duly considered, Alexander's achievements were a much less arduous task than those of many other warriors, whose successes have been far less brilliant, and whose names shine with a much less dazzling lustre.

It must, however be confessed, that some of Alexander's projects are characteristic of a political and commercial, as well as a warlike genius,

and redound more to his honour than his mad career of conquest. His foundation of the city of Alexandria, in a situation so extremely favourable to commerce, seems to indicate an extensive view of the advantages accruing from trade; and the flourishing state of that city, both while it continued the capital of an independent kingdom, and afterwards under the Roman and Byzantine empires, displays the justness of his understanding in the choice of so excellent a situation for a great mercantile city. His sending out his admiral Nearchus, to explore the coasts of Persia and India, also shews, that he was actuated by a spirit of discovery, as well as an avidity of conquest; and if he had attained to an advanced age, it is not possible to conceive what he might have performed, when the best parts of the world being subdued, conquest could no longer have presented to him the same allurements.

Historians have entertained us with strange and contradictory accounts of the causes of the death of this conqueror. Many of them ascribe it to the effect of poison, an opinion, which, if we consider his arbitrary conduct, in many respects so disagreeable to the Greeks and Macedonians, and above all the unprincipled ambition of his generals, is not at all improbable; but they have related many improbable and romantic circumstances concerning the affair, which may be seen in Plutarch, and other authors. The opinion of others is, that he died of a disease

contracted by drunkenness and intemperance. All, however, that we can collect from those contradictory relations is, that he died of a fever at Babylon, about B. C. 324, and about two hundred and fifteen years after the conquest of Babylon, and the establishment of the Persian empire by Cyrus.

Having been impelled by the nature of the subject to make remarks somewhat at large on a war the most important, and terminated with the most splendid success of any recorded in the annals of military enterprize, as well as on the circumstances and character of the most celebrated conqueror mentioned in history, let us now take a general view of the progress of arts, science, and literature, during the period of two hundred and fifteen years which elapsed during the existence of the Persian empire, from its establishment on the ruins of that of Babylon by Cyrus, about B. C. 540, to its final subversion by the Greeks under Alexander, B. C. 330. On turning our eyes upon Greece during this interesting period, a noble and most delightful prospect of the rapid advancement of the human mind, in every department of scientific and literary acquisition, presents itself to our view. The rudiments of philosophy and civil polity, and of almost every art and science, which Greece had received from Egypt, were so well cultivated and improved by the active and penetrating genius of her people, that in the space of less than three centuries, from their first appli-

cation to the arts and embellishments of civilized society, the Greeks had made so extraordinary a progress in architecture; painting, statuary, and other ornamental arts, as well as every kind of literary composition, that they have never yet been surpassed. Their performances in all these kinds have always been esteemed models of excellence; and their writings, in every branch of composition, have, in all ages, to this very day, been looked up to as the standard of literary perfection. In sublimity of thought, and accuracy of reasoning, their philosophers attract our administration; and their poets and orators, if ever they have been equalled, have most certainly never been excelled by any, either in ancient or modern times. In the time of Alexander, or rather of his father, Philip, and the age immediately preceeding, Greece exhibited a most interesting spectacle of the highly cultivated state of the human intellect. The education of youth was one of the principal objects attended to by persons of opulence, as without it no one could hope for advancement to civil or military offices, which, by reason of the many different states into which Greece was divided, were very numerous. These considerations were powerful incitements to industry and emulation. The frequent wars which the Grecian states waged one against another, as well as against their potent adversary, the Persian monarch, stimulated them to the study of tactics and the practice of military discipline: so that

arts and arms, literature and politics, were equally cultivated, and opened numerous roads to promotion and honour. In the age immediately preceding the reign of Philip of Macedonia, Greece displays the striking picture of a country offering every possible stimulus to the exertion of every faculty, and of a people making every effort to advance the human intellect to the highest degree of perfection. In contemplating, however, the aspect of the world at large, we find that Greece alone afforded a prospect so pleasing, the rest of the world, immersed in effeminate luxury or barbaric ignorance, presented a deplorable and disgusting contrast. Persia wallowing in riches and luxury, studious only of ostentatious magnificence and splendid pageantry, declined from her former power and greatness as rapidly as Greece advanced to the meridian of her glory. Egypt had lost her ancient splendor, and was in subjection to Persia. In those countries the sciences, no doubt, were still cultivated; in Persia by the magi, and in Egypt by the priests; but where genius and learning are not considered as the means of acquiring wealth, or of obtaining honour and promotion, they generally soon decline. They seldom flourish much when the national taste takes a contrary turn. Under a despotic government the sciences seldom flourish, unless when an intelligent prince sits on the throne, who knows how to appreciate and reward genius and learning. If, however, the Egyptians and Persians still re-

tained some knowledge of and taste for the arts and sciences, they were eclipsed in arts, as well as in arms, by the superior attainments of the Greeks. Only this remark it is requisite to make, that the rise of Greece effecting the downfall of Persia, all our monuments of ancient learning have descended down to us from the former. None of the works of the Persian magi, or of the priests of ancient Egypt or Babylon, have been transmitted to us. Lapse of time, and the destructive revolutions which so often desolated or changed the face of the ancient world, have produced an universal wreck of all ancient learning, which existed prior to the flourishing æra of Grecian literature. Whatever might have been the state of learning among the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Persians, none of their literary monuments have descended down to us. All the accounts we have of those nations, of their history, their political state, their religion, their scientific and literary attainments, and general manners, except such lights as are occasionally afforded, relative to those subjects in the Hebrew scriptures, have been transmitted to us through the medium of Greek writers. The Greeks plundered the literary treasures of all nations, and whatever learning they found among them they made in their own. Thus we have no exact criterion by which we can judge of the literary progress of other nations ; and of the vast mass of Grecian science and learning, it is impossible to determine how much is of their

own growth, and how much of it was imported from abroad. Of all the nations of remote antiquity, the Jews are the only people whose literary monuments have, by an extraordinary and providential combination of circumstances, descended down to modern times.

Notwithstanding this universal annihilation of all the monuments of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Persian literature, it appears certain, from general circumstances, that those nations had made no inconsiderable advances in mental improvement. The learning of the Babylonians and Egyptians is often spoken of in the scriptures. So early as in the age of Moses, the scientific attainments of the latter are spoken of, and the Hebrew legislator is said to have been instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians. And the prophet Jeremiah, in addressing himself to Babylon, says, "Thy wisdom, and thy learning, hath perverted thee," &c. These, and many other expressions, and circumstantial hints, which may be collected from the Hebrew scriptures, point out the Babylonians as a people studious of intellectual improvement, although plunged in superstition, and bewildered in error, like all the ancient pagans, whose religion was not under the light and guidance of Divine Revelation, and whose philosophy was wholly founded on conjecture, and not on experiment. As to the Egyptians, the Greeks themselves are not ashamed to bestow the highest encomiums on their philosophy and learning. The magnificent re-

remains of Thebes do not more strongly attest the ancient splendor of Egypt, than the ruins of Persepolis prove that Persia was once the seat of the arts, and of elegant magnificence; and if the literary productions of the Persians had passed down to us, like those of the Greeks, we should have not only juster ideas, but, perhaps, a higher opinion of the state of intellectual improvement among the former than we commonly accustom ourselves to entertain. The fatal issue of their last contest with Greece, however, after making every allowance for Greek partiality and national prejudice, demonstrably proves the bad state of their political administration and military discipline. One great fault in the Persian system of government was, the division of their empire into a number of unconnected and almost independent governments, the governors of which attended only to the affairs of their own provinces, without thinking themselves obliged to take any measures for the general safety of the empire, of which the history of their transactions with the Greeks furnishes many instances; and all their military operations, in the war against Alexander, evidence the greatest unskillfulness in tactics, as well as the greatest relaxation of discipline. Their numerous armies seemed to march to a parade rather than to battle, every thing in their equipment being calculated more for ostentatious shew than for real utility.

If we leave the affairs of the Greeks and Persians, the two principal nations which command

our notice during the period we are now contemplating, and cast a glance on the Jews and Romans, we see the former a tributary people under the Persian monarchy, enjoying their own laws and religion, and living peaceably under its protection ; and the latter a warlike, patriotic, and rising nation. The Romans had lived under a monarchical government during the space of 245 years from the foundation of their city, during which time seven kings had successively swayed the sceptre ; but the Roman monarchy seems always to have been under limitations, and the senate and people were not without some share of the government. Having expelled the last of their kings, Lucius Tarquinius, surnamed Superbus, or the Proud, on account of the rape committed by his son on Lucretia, a Roman lady, as well as for various other acts of despotism and oppression, they had established a republican government about B. C. 508, about twenty-seven years before the invasion of Greece by Xerxes, and one hundred and seventy-eight years before the subversion of the Persian empire by Alexander. The Romans had already begun to aggrandize themselves by war and conquest, but their conquests were as yet but of small extent and importance, and it was long before they extended their dominions far beyond the environs of their mud-walled city. At the time when Alexander conquered the Persian empire, the Roman territory did not consist of a much greater part of Italy than the present

Campania di Roma: and Rome, afterwards the mistress of the world, was not then considered of any importance in the political scale of nations. The Romans at that period had made no progress in the arts, nor in literature. We hear of their orators, and of their speeches, but their eloquence was that of a clear and vigorous, but uncultivated understanding; without any of that artificial arrangement of argument and language, of that studied eloquence called rhetoric, so much cultivated and esteemed among the Greeks. As to the Jews they have never been esteemed a scientific people; but during this period they addicted themselves to the study of philosophy, so far as to intermix many of the opinions of the oriental philosophers with their own religious tenets. From this circumstances the two opposite sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees originated, which were unknown during the existence of the Jewish monarchy, before Babylonian captivity. Of these two celebrated sects, the Sadducees pretended to adhere strictly to the law of Moses, while the Pharisees, besides a number of Jewish traditions, had adopted opinions which they had imbibed by their connections with the Babylonians and Persians, during the time of the captivity. A third sect, called the Essenes, had also risen among the Jews. The celebrated historian, Flavius Josephus, gives a circumstantial detail of the particular tenets of those Jewish sects.

After this attempt to trace a picture of the po-

litical, moral, and intellectual world, as it appeared among the Persians, the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans, during the period which elapsed between the reigns of those two celebrated conquerors, Cyrus, and Alexander, and which comprised the whole duration of the Persian empire, it is requisite to turn our eyes upon the general state of the most remarkable countries of the modern world, during this interesting period of antiquity. All Europe, except Greece, and a very small part of Italy, was then unnoticed and unknown. The countries now so flourishing in arts and arms, where all the useful and ornamental sciences are brought to so high a state of perfection, where every branch of literature is so assiduously cultivated, where all the channels of commerce are so industriously explored, where every elegance of social life is to be found, where luxury reigns in all its variety of forms, where large and populous cities abound, and where universities and academies are so numerous and so flourishing; those countries which now send forth their fleets to collect the productions of every climate, and establish colonies on the farthest shores of the globe, were yet immersed in savage obscurity, and as little known to the then civilized world as the deserts of Arabia and Tartary, or the interior of Africa are to us at this day. This was the state of the countries of greatest note in the modern world, at a period when Greece had attained to the summit of her splendor, and when

her ingenious inhabitants had made so astonishing a progress in the various departments of human knowledge. When Athens was the seat of science and literature, abounding in seminaries of learning, and crowded with philosophers, orators, legislators, and heroes, London and Paris, at this time the two central points of all that is great and elegant, were nothing but woody swamps; and if any of the human species made those places their residence, they were only savages wandering in those then desert wildernesses, at that time totally unknown to civilized man. What a wonderful change! In the age of Philip and Alexander, Italy, Spain, and France, were to Greece what America is to us; and all the rest of Europe, unless, perhaps, the southern coast of Britain, was as little known as America was in the days of Columbus, and as New Zealand is at this time. Germany, Poland, Russia, Denmark, and Sweden, was then nothing but an immense extent of woods and wildernesses, of vast and impassable morrasses and trackless deserts, inhabited by beasts of prey, or men in the most savage state of uncultivated nature, not superior to the most uncivilized tribes discovered in America, New Zealand, and the other islands in the South Seas, by our late voyagers and circumnavigators. What a wonderful change has time produced! Egypt, where the rudiments of arts and sciences were invented, where philosophy was first studied, where civil polity was first reduced to a regular system,

where human grandeur was displayed in every variety of form ; and Greece, where the learning of Egypt was improved, corrected, and methodized, and where every art and science that could embellish a nation and improve the human intellect, was carried to a degree of perfection, which has excited the admiration of all succeeding ages, are now plunged in the grossest barbarity and ignorance, and their magnificent edifices laid in ruins. Even the situation of some of the largest and most celebrated cities of the ancient world cannot, at this time, be ascertained. Nineveh, so long the capital of the Assyrian empire, and Babylon, " the glory of nations and the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency,"* have long ago been so completely annihilated that it cannot be exactly determined where they stood ; and as to the celebrated city of Memphis, long the metropolis of Egypt, and the royal residence of the Pharaohs, although we have the most unquestionable evidence of its extent, which some say was seventeen, and others nineteen miles in circuit, as also of its strength and magnificence, yet the most curious antiquarians and geographers are not able to ascertain the place of its situation. Scarcely any circumstance of ancient geography has been more critically discussed, or given rise to a greater variety of opinions, than the situation of this celebrated city. Modern travellers, as Dr. Pocock,

* Isaiah, Ch. xiii. v. 19.

Capt. Norden, Mr. Savary, and many others, have attempted to solve the difficulty ; and each of them has given plausible reasons for his own hypothesis, without being able to come to any agreement among themselves. We are assured by the concurrent testimonies of all ancient authors who have mentioned Memphis, that it stood on the west side of the Nile ; but while some of the moderns supposed it to have been situated where Gize now stands, opposite to Cairo, others place its situation fifteen, and others seventeen miles farther to the south ; and Capt. Norden thinks the largest of the Pyramids stood within its walls. Many other noted cities of the ancient world have had a similar destiny ; and innumerable monuments of the grandeur and magnificence of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, now no longer exist. The total annihilation of Nineveh, Babylon, and Memphis, shews in the most striking manner, the instability of all human power and grandeur ; and we cannot but contemplate with astonishment the fluctuating state of all mundane affairs, and observe how nations rise and flourish, decline and fall, by the incessant operation of an inexplicable and closely connected chain of causes and effects, by which the Supreme Being, in his infinite wisdom, governs the world, connecting the whole series of events in one vast and eternal plan, infinitely beyond our comprehension, although undoubtedly consistent with the most perfect harmony.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

Concluding with those reflections, I beg leave
to assure you, that, with unfeigned respect,
I am, dear Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XI.

SIR,

HAVING taken a cursory retrospect of an interesting period in the history of the world, and of the human mind, we now proceed to the contemplation of one still more important, as it approaches somewhat nearer to a prospect of the modern world. The period, on which we now enter, is that which commenced at Alexander's death, and ended at the birth of Christ. At the commencement of this period we see all the known parts of Asia, which had constituted first the Assyrian and Babylonian, and, in the next place, the Persian empire; as also Greece, the only civilized and scientific country of Europe, under the absolute government of a Greek military force; Rome, a rising and warlike state, and the rest of Europe, in respect of Greece, what America is now to Europe. A new scene now begins to open. The Roman power begins to predominate; and the victories of Rome were the means of civilizing and instructing all that part of Europe which lies south of the Danube, and west of the Rhine. In proportion as we leave the shades of antiquity farther behind, the prospect brightens and grows clearer; the view of transactions and of manners becomes more luminous, and the scene begins to be removed nearer home. In this portion of

history, the convulsions which shook the world, through the restless ambition of Alexander's successors, hold a distinguished place. During the greatest part of this period the transactions of the political world constituted two distinct and important scenes which were displayed on two different theatres. In the east, the unceasing war carried on by Alexander's generals, and their successors, among themselves, convulsed all Greece and the western countries of Asia; while in the west the insatiable and enterprizing ambition of Rome agitated all the best parts of Europe, especially in her long and desperate contest with her great rival the republic of Carthage. The reciprocal hostilities, the jarring interests, the irreconcilable animosities, and multiplied crimes of the Macedonian generals, and of the successors of their usurpations, are sufficiently detailed by historians. A concentrated view of the conduct and destiny of the principal of those usurpers will suffice to excite reflections, without which the reading of history is only an idle and useless employment.

As soon as Alexander's eyes were closed, the principal commanders held a consultation on the state of public affairs. Ptolemy voted that the empire should be governed by a sovereign council of the generals, and every thing relating to the administration be determined by a majority in that council; while some moved that Perdicas should be elected king. In this unsettled state of affairs Aridæus, son of Philip, but not by Olympias, and consequently half brother of

Alexander, was elected king by the army, and the generals were obliged to ratify the election. Perdikkas and Leonatus then issued out of Babylon, and put Meleager to death, for exciting the army to the election of Aridæus. They then mustered the army near Babylon, and made themselves masters of the king's person. A new council of the generals was then held, in which they divided the government of the empire among themselves, leaving Aridæus only the title of king, and placed Perdikkas over him, with the title of Protector. Antipater, whom the council had made governor of Macedonia, reduced Greece, which had revolted from their government, placed a garrison in Athens, abolished the popular form of its government, and placed the administration in the hands of about nine thousand men of distinction and property; thus establishing an aristocracy, instead of the former democratical system. He deprived the people of all right of suffrage, and removed numbers of them into Thrace. Antipater designed to put the celebrated orator, Demosthenes, to death. Seeing his death determined, that great man asked leave to retire a few moments to write something, and seizing that opportunity, took poison, which he had ready prepared.

The restless ambition of the generals, however, was not long before it began to produce the most direful effects, and to convulse every part of the empire. Ptolemy, Antipater, and Craterus, commenced a war against Perdikkas, who invaded

Egypt, which was Ptolemy's government, and was slain by his own soldiers. He was the first of the Macedonian generals who fell in those civil wars, and his death was soon followed by that of Craterus, who was slain in battle against Eumenes. Antipater was, after the death of Perdiccas, made Protector, and took the king and queen and carried them into Macedonia, leaving Antigonus governor, or lieutenant, of the Asiatic part of the empire. Antipater died at the age of eighty: he was a man of letters, and had been a scholar of Aristotle. Polyperchon was then chosen Protector; but Cassander, the son of Antipater, immediately rebelled against him. Polyperchon restored the democratic government of Athens, and the other cities of Greece, and caused most of the aristocratic party to be put to death. Thus was Greece alternately a prey to aristocratic oppression and popular licentiousness, under the tyranny of the Macedonian usurpers of Alexander's empire. The next intestine commotion was a war between Antigonus and Eumenes, in which Eumenes, after performing the most heroic actions in the field, and displaying all the talents of a consummate general, was betrayed by the regiment of Argyraspides, or silver shields, into the hands of Antigonus, who put him to death. During these transactions, Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, having taken King Aridæus, and Eurydice, his Queen, put them both to death, and appointed young Alex-

ander, son of Alexander and Roxana, heir to the empire. Cassander then undertook an expedition against Olympias, who, with Roxana, her young son Alexander, and the whole court, shut themselves up in Pydisa. Olympias was obliged to surrender herself to Cassander, and at his instigation was tried and condemned in a great council of Macedonian officers, and put to death in pursuance of the sentence there passed on her; a just punishment for her multiplied crimes of ambition and cruelty. Thus fell, by the hand of the executioner, the wife of Philip of Macedonia, and mother of Alexander the Great.

Antigonus having, by the treachery of the Argyraspides, accomplished the destruction of his prudent and valiant rival Eumenes, made himself master of all Media and Persia, slew Python, and drove Seleucus from Babylon; but his sudden and extraordinary aggrandizement raised against him a potent confederacy of the other generals. Ptolemy, Cassander, and Seleucus, united their forces to reduce the exorbitant power of Antigonus, who, about this time assumed the title of king, in which he was imitated by Ptolemy, Seleucus, and Lysimachus; thus the Greek, or Macedonian empire, which subsisted, in reality, no longer than the life of Alexander, now lost even its nominal existence, and was split into several independent and hostile kingdoms.

The confederacy just mentioned, however,

proved fatal to Antigonus. Seleucus recovered Babylon and the countries of the upper Asia : Antigonus having gotten into his hands Cleopatra, sister of Alexander the Great, who was to be espoused to Ptolemy, put that princess to death, lest Ptolemy should derive any advantage from such an alliance with the family of Alexander, whose memory was dear to the Macedonian soldiery. Thus did those usurpers carefully endeavour to extirpate the whole family of their late victorious master. The war being carried forwards by the confederate princes against Antigonus, Lysimachus entered also into the confederacy, and Antigonus was slain at the battle of Issus, near the city of Ephesus, which he fought against the united forces of Seleucus and Lysimachus. Thus fell this ambitious and restless usurper, at the age of about eighty. Cassander dying in Macedonia, his son Alexander was put to death by Demetrius Poliorcetes, son of Antigonus ; and his other son, Antipater, was also put to death by Lysimachus, whose daughter he had married. Lysimachus after this put to death his own son Agathocles, whose wife and children fled to Seleucus for protection, and prevailed on him to commence a war against Lysimachus. In this war Lysimachus, and his fifteen children, all perished by different accidents. Lysimachus himself, at the age of seventy-four, fell in battle against Seleucus. After the overthrow and death of Lysimachus, Seleucus passed over into Europe, to take possession of Macedonia, where

he was treacherously murdered, being then about seventy-four or seventy-five years of age. Thus fell, by assassination, Seleucus, the last of those generals who had been trained to arms under Philip of Macedonia, and had accompanied Alexander in his extraordinary and successful career of conquest. Ptolemy died in Egypt some time before the death of Seleucus. He was not only a warlike, but a humane and munificent prince, and was the only one of Alexander's generals who outrode the storms which incessantly rose in the political horizon of that tempestuous age; for, Antipater died of mere old age, just at the commencement of those intestine commotions, and consequently did not experience much of their direful effect.

Scarcely any period of the history of mankind exhibits a more striking picture of the dreadful effects of the human passions than the age immediately following the death of Alexander. The generals who had served under him, and afterwards usurped his empire, although their dominions were sufficiently extensive and opulent to make them all great and powerful monarchs, were so infatuated, as to sacrifice to a restless ambition and insatiable avarice, all the tranquillity and happiness of their own lives, and to render all the countries, situated within their sphere of action, a vast theatre of bloodshed and crimes. They not only extirpated the whole family of Philip and Alexander, but continually fought, and at last, partly by open force, and

partly by treachery, accomplished each other's destruction.

Perhaps there has scarcely been a situation on the moral theatre of the world more novel and interesting than that of those Macedonian generals who seized on Alexander's dominions. They had been trained to arms under Philip, and had seen Macedonia, which till that time had been an obscure and unnoticed kingdom, emerge from that abject state, acting a conspicuous part in the political world, and gaining a decided ascendancy over all Greece. They had been the partners of Philip's warlike toils, and had expected to partake of his glory in the conquest of Persia. They had witnessed the untimely fall of their politic and warlike master, and seen his vast projects executed by his son. They had been principal actors under Alexander, in the conquest of the Persian empire, and following his victorious standard, had penetrated into Bactra and India, countries hitherto unknown to the Greeks. They had seen the unexpected death of their conquering leader, and the termination of all his ambitious projects. They had seen his extensive conquests fall into their own hands, and, from poor Macedonian officers, had become sovereign princes, and each of them acquired kingdoms for themselves more wealthy and extensive than that of Macedonia. They had launched into a new world, and their fortune had exceeded their most sanguine hopes, but did not procure for them, in the latter part

of their lives, that tranquillity and repose, which age, and a life of long continued labours, seemed to require. Their mutual animosities and ceaseless hostilities embittered the remaining part of their lives; and after all their brilliant career of conquest, they passed their old age in scenes of danger, tumult, and carnage; and few of them descended to the grave in peace, exhibiting to posterity a memorable example of the dreadful effects of lawless and insatiable ambition.

When we reflect on this grand enterprise of Alexander, and his brilliant conquest of the Persian empire, we cannot but observe, that it was scarcely less disastrous and fatal to the conquerors than to the conquered, whether considered in its national consequences or in its effects, in regard to the individuals principally concerned in it. Considered in a national view, the untimely death of Alexander; the dismemberment and partition of his empire among the Macedonian generals, and their unceasing hostilities, agitated those countries with continual commotions, and entailed innumerable evils upon the people. The Greeks in particular, being compelled to follow the fortunes of those rival usurpers as different circumstances required, were, more than any others, exposed to the horrors of war, to repeated subjugations, tyranny, and oppression; and suffered at least as much from the tyranny of their own countrymen as they might have expected to suffer from the Persians, if

they had conquered Greece. If we consider the consequences of this memorable conquest, in regard to the individuals who accomplished it, we see it decidedly fatal to the tranquillity of their future lives. A few of the principal commanders, indeed, gratified their ambition by usurping the sovereign power and regal title; but their crowns proved to them crowns of thorns. Harrassed by continual and bloody wars among themselves, and strangers to that repose which the evening of a life spent in warlike toils imperiously required, the greatest part of them fell by war or treason, and their hoary heads descended to the grave with blood. That invincible army of brave and warlike veterans, which Philip had trained and Alexander led into Asia, was worn out in fruitless hostilities, and few of the brave soldiers, who achieved the conquest of Persia, ever returned to their native country. Such was the fate of those gallant veterans who conquered the Persian empire.

The succeeding history of the kingdom into which the empire of the Greeks in Europe and Asia was divided, exhibits a most disgusting scene of hostilities and treasons, of misfortunes and of crimes, until they fell successively under the dominion of the Romans. Of all those different kingdoms, that of Egypt, founded by Ptolemy Lagus, who, in the general partition of Alexander's empire, seized on that country, was the only one which flourished in a state of permanent stability. Under the reign of the Pto-

lemies Egypt recovered her ancient splendor, and the celebrity she had acquired under the Pharaohs, her ancient and native princes, Alexander became what Thebes and Memphis once had been, and even rivalled Athens, in the number and celebrity of her schools of philosophy and literature. In the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the second prince of the Grecian dynasty, the Sacred Scriptures of the Jews first made their appearance in a foreign language. That illustrious encourager of learning, desirous of collecting the whole mass of human knowledge, employed intelligent and learned men, to procure books from all parts where they could be found; and, at his particular request, 72 learned Jews were sent B. C. 282, from Jerusalem to translate the scriptures into the Greek language, which was the language of Alexandria, the Egyptian being then spoken only by the vulgar in that country. The particulars relative to this celebrated translation are circumstantially related by Flavius Josephus, who being of the sacerdotal order, and a person of authority and rank, without doubt, had access to the archives of the Jewish nation, and consequently had every opportunity of being well acquainted with the transaction, which would undoubtedly be recorded in the annals of that nation at Jerusalem, as well as in the archives of Alexandria. This translation is called the Septuagint, and was always held in great repute among the primitive Fathers, as well as among

many modern theologians and critics. Ptolemy Philadelphus is deservedly celebrated as one of the greatest promoters of learning mentioned in history; and from his exertions, in so laudable a pursuit, he has derived more glory than can accrue from the sanguinary career of conquest. He is said to have collected a library of 500,000 volumes; and his reign forms a memorable epoch in the annals of literature.

If from Egypt we turn our attention to the Jews, the affairs of that nation afford a view of some interesting events during this period. The deliverance of that people from the tyranny and oppression of the Greeks by the unexampled bravery and patriotism of Judas Maccabæus, and his valiant brethren and followers, is a transaction as glorious as any performed by the most illustrious heroes of Greece and Rome. It originated from the noblest motives, and every circumstance considered, was a more arduous task, and consequently more glorious than the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander, or, perhaps, than all the achievements of Cæsar. Those conquerors had always to contend with enemies, whose forces, however numerous, were far inferior to their own in military discipline and tactical skill; but Maccabæus and his brethren entered on a most important and dangerous contest, with an enemy not only superior in numbers, but beyond all comparison superior in discipline, and the science of tactics; and by a persevering courage, which no difficulties

could daunt, effected the deliverance of their country from political and religious oppression. Judas nobly fell, after having accomplished his grand object, and his family pursuing their advantages with unremitting perseverance and exertion, established the independence of their country, and changed its government from a feeble and unsettled republic to a vigorous and flourishing monarchy; for John Hyrcanus, the son of Simon Maccabæus, uniting in his person the offices of high-priest, and generalissimo of the army, and in his mind all the talents appropriated to the pontifical, military, and regal characters, having been victorious over the enemies of his country, and firmly established his government, his sons successively assumed the title as well as the power of kings; and the high-priesthood also remained in the same family, although not in the person of the monarch. The descendants of Hyrcanus are distinguished in the history of the Jewish nation, by the appellation of the Asmonean dynasty. The dissensions of this family at last terminated in the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey, and the subjection of the Jewish nation to the Romans. After this event we again see the Jewish monarchy re-established by the favour, and under the protection, of the Romans, who placed Herod the Great, the son of Antipater, the Idumæan, on the throne of David. This prince took down the old temple of Jerusalem, and rebuilt it again in the most magnificent manner, and

reigned with great splendor, but with almost unparalleled tyranny. Herod was a prince of great and splendid talents, but unconscientious and unfeeling, as may justly be concluded from his putting to death his beautiful and beloved wife Mariamne, and his two sons, princes of the most brilliant accomplishments, and the most promising talents. He had also condemned to death his favorite son Antipater, but his own death prevented the execution of the sentence. The narration of this prince's cruelties may be seen at large in Josephus, who paints, in glowing colours, the treasons and cabals of his court, and describes, in nervous and elegant language, his unquiet and troublesome reign; presenting posterity with a long detail of his domestic unhappiness, and his crimes. Indeed, of all the princes whose names are recorded in history, Herod seems to have experienced the greatest portion of domestic infelicity. Within a short time after the death of Herod, Judæa having undergone different changes in its form of government, was reduced to a Roman province, in which state it was at the conclusion of the period we are now contemplating.

During the whole of this period, which elapsed between the death of Alexander and the coming of Christ, the rapid progress of the Romans, in arts and arms, in the aggrandizement of power, the acquisition of wealth, and the extension of dominion, constitutes the most conspicuous feature in the political aspect of the world, and

the most important and interesting subject of history. In the age of Alexander we have seen the Roman territory comprised within a small part of Italy, and it would require volumes to detail the long series of wars and conquests which exalted Rome to that pitch of power and glory to which she afterwards attained; but, upon a general view, we shall find the most powerful cause, under Divine Providence, to have been the strict and unremitting attention ever paid by the Romans to the most vigorous military discipline, and their study of every particular relative to the tactical science, joined to vigorous and decisive measures in their councils. The arts of war and eloquence were, during a long time, the only arts cultivated and held in repute by the Romans; and during the whole period of the existence of the republic, rhetoric and the military art were the grand objects of Roman study, as they were the only means of acquiring honour and fame, the sole objects of Roman pursuit. Ambition, not avarice, was the ruling passion among the Romans, and consequently commerce was not held in high esteem, nor much attended to. Conquest was the object of their pursuit, and war their employment. Every citizen was a soldier, and the limited time of their military service was ten years. The manner of their encampments, the regularity of their discipline, and the whole system of their tactics, are curious subjects of investigation. An account of all these things may be met with

in ancient authors, and no classical student can be unacquainted with them. One particular characteristic of the Roman republic is, that ill fortune, disaster, and defeat, never had any intimidating effect on its councils. Roman courage always rose superior to the difficulties it had to encounter. Of this, their grand contest with the rival republic of Carthage, one of the most remarkable, important, and obstinate recorded in history, affords repeated and signal instances. - The Romans, although reduced to the last extremity, never lost their courage, nor relaxed any thing in their efforts. When pressed on every side by Hannibal, who had given their armies the most signal defeats, and ravaged their territories to the very gates of Rome, no pusillanimous measures were adopted in the senate; every possible exertion was made, and no thought of submitting to an ignominious peace was ever entertained.

It has generally been supposed that Hannibal committed a great error in not assaulting Rome immediately after his signal victory at Cannæ; and historians, echoing one another's assertions, have confidently told us, that Hannibal knew how to gain victories, but not how to make use of them. Every school-boy is acquainted with this stigma on the character of one of the greatest generals that ever existed in any age or nation. We ought not, however, rashly to censure the conduct of so distinguished a military character. The plan of operations might be deter-

mined by causes unknown to those who have related the circumstance. The success of military operations depends on a multitude of circumstances, many of which may seem trivial to such persons as are not concerned in the affair, or are not perfectly acquainted with the nature of the case; and consequently it is impossible to form a right judgment of circumstances, and motives of action, after the lapse of many centuries. As far, however, as we are authorized by historical representation, of existing circumstances, to judge of Hannibal's conduct, in this very important particular, he may reasonably be exculpated of the charge of cowardice or oversight, in neglecting the advantages which his victory at Cannæ may seem to have afforded him. After such a battle, fought against such troops as the Roman legions, it cannot be supposed but his army, although victorious, must have exceedingly suffered. By the dreadful carnage on the side of the Romans, we may justly conclude that of the Carthaginians to have been very considerable. Rome, although at that time inconsiderable in comparison of what it afterwards became, was, notwithstanding, even then a large, strong, and populous city, and the inhabitants prepared to die with their swords in their hands. Those who are skilled in military affairs, are the best able to decide the question, whether it would have been prudent in Hannibal to have attempted, with the remains of a shattered army, to storm such a

city, defended by such citizens; and whether he could have either given the assault, or commenced a siege with any great probability of success. However, Hannibal's leaving Rome behind, and putting his army into winter quarters at Capua, whatever were his motives, are commonly assigned as the causes of the subsequent ill success of the Carthaginian arms; but it is much more reasonable to presume, the true cause of their disasters originated from the intrigues and cabals of the faction of Hannibal's enemies in the senate of Carthage, whose hatred against that illustrious commander predominated over the love of their country, and who were better pleased to have their armies defeated than to see them victorious under his banners. Had not this faction acquired a predominating influence in the senate of Carthage, there is every reason to believe that the Roman power would, in that war, have been totally annihilated. Less could scarcely have been expected from a general whose courage and prudence had crowned him with laurels; whose signal achievements had rendered him master of almost all Italy; whose whole military career has made him be esteemed the greatest general of all antiquity; and who had sworn upon the altar an irreconcilable enmity to Rome.

Divine Providence, however, had not decreed the extinction of the Roman name. The enemies of Hannibal gained every day a more decided predominancy in the Carthaginian senate. Not-

withstanding his repeated and pressing solicitations, no reinforcements were sent him; the fortune of the war was consequently soon changed. The Romans, adopting the most vigorous measures, invaded Africa; and although so lately in the most imminent danger of being attacked in their own capital, suddenly appeared before that of the enemy. Hannibal, who a little time before had advanced to the gates of Rome, was recalled from Italy to protect the walls of Carthage, and defeated by Scipio at the memorable battle of Zama, B. C. 201, which terminated the power and greatness of the Carthaginian republic; for the Carthaginians being compelled to submit to the most disadvantageous conditions of peace, could never more rise to that power they had once possessed. This was the termination of the second Punic war. Every one knows that the result of the third was fatal to Carthage. That great and flourishing city was totally destroyed, B. C. 146, and her dominions were reduced to a Roman province. Until that memorable epoch, Rome had made continual, but slow, advances towards power and greatness. Her whole territory at first did not exceed twenty-five miles in circuit; and when Alexander conquered the Persian empire, 422 years after the foundation of Rome, 179 years after the expulsion of the Roman kings, and about 330 years before Christ, the whole Roman dominions, as has been already observed; scarcely extended much farther than the limits of the

present Campaigna. And it was not until B. C. 262, and 490 years after the building of Rome, that the Romans first carried their arms beyond the confines of Italy.

After the subjection of Carthage, in the second Punic war, Rome had no longer any rival, and, victorious in every quarter, she carried all before her. Macedonia, with all Greece, and the Grecian kingdoms of Asia, successively fell under her dominion, and she extended her empire from the Euphrates to the Atlantic ocean, and from the Rhine and the Danube to the deserts of Arabia and Africa, comprising within her territories the whole civilized and then known world. From that time until the decline of the empire, the history of Rome is the history of the world. A wide field now opens itself to observation, and the reflecting mind may find ample matter for contemplation. The aspect of the world was now totally changed. The different kingdoms and states, which, during a long succession of ages, had been fluctuating with incessant revolutions, rising, falling, and subjugating one another, were swallowed up in one mighty and extensive empire. But Rome, now mistress of the world, was soon rent with intestine commotions. The cause from which those evils seem to have originated was coeval with Rome itself, or at least with the republican government. This was an odious distinction, which divided the Roman citizens into two distinct and unconnected bodies, the Patricians and Plebei-

ans, or, as we should term them in modern language, the aristocratic and democratic classes. Romulus, immediately after the building of Rome, had constituted the senate, but the people had also their rights: and it appears, that the rights and privileges of the senate and people, as well as the royal prerogative, were clearly defined, although it is difficult, at this distance of time, exactly to discriminate and ascertain the rights of the king, senate, and people. The Roman writers; it is true, have pretended a considerable degree of accuracy in those particulars; but it is somewhat questionable, whether the historians, who lived in the polished ages of Rome, could obtain such particular information, relative to these subjects, as they pretend to transmit to posterity. It is certain that the annals of Rome, in her primeval state, were very defective, as the first Romans were an unlettered people; and the use of letters was, in all probability, introduced among them, by Numa Pompilius, their second king. Historical evidence does not authorize any reasonable supposition, that either Romulus, or his subjects, possessed any knowledge of literature. On the expulsion of the kings, and the establishment of the republican government, the two classes of citizens, the Patricians and Plebeians, were so completely separated, and the line of demarcation, between their respective privileges and rights, was drawn with such punctilious accuracy; as to constitute them two distinct bodies, whose interests were

diametrically opposite. All the offices of the republic were appropriated to the Patrician families, but the people had the privilege of electing to those offices. The Plebeians, however, soon saw themselves excluded, not only from all the honours, but also from all the emoluments of the republic; and were kept in a state of poverty, while the Patricians had every opportunity of acquiring large possessions. They alone, and their adherents, possessed the lands acquired by conquest, while the Plebeians, who fought and bled to conquer them, were excluded from any share. By the nature of the Roman constitution, it appears, that what was conquered by the joint efforts of citizens, should have been equally divided among them, as none, who possessed the property determined by the laws, were exempted from military service. The people perfectly understood that such division was their indisputable right, and an agrarian law to that effect was constantly the object of their aim and expectation. This, however, could never be carried into effect. Some pretext was always found by the Patricians for postponing it, and the longer it was deferred the greatest difficulties arose to impede the enacting and execution of any such law. Indeed, after some lapse of time, when those lands had been long in the possession of the great, an agrarian law could not have been carried into execution without producing the most dreadful disorders, and throwing the state into confusion and anarchy. The

Plebeian party, however, made repeated efforts to diminish the exorbitant power of the Patricians. A law was procured, called the Licinian law, which prohibited any citizen to possess more than 500 acres of land; but a law, so favourable to the poor, and so hostile to the interests of the great and opulent, was universally evaded. The first important advantage gained by the Plebeian party, was a law permitting the intermarriage of the Patricians and Plebeians, which gradually lessened the distance between the two classes. But above all, the election of tribunes, to watch over the interests of the people, was the most disastrous blow to the authority of the Patrician order. No person who has the least acquaintance with Roman history, is ignorant of the repeated, and, indeed, almost continual struggles between the two parties. Historians have given a circumstantial narrative of the secession of the people to the Mons Sacer, the sedition of the Aventine Mount, the tumults excited by the Gracchi, and other popular commotions. Indeed the history of the republic presents hardly any thing to our view but a continued scene of wars abroad, and of contests at home, between the two opposite classes of citizens; and the termination of almost every struggle was in favour of the popular party, till at last Caius Marius, a Plebeian, was elected Consul in spite of all the opposition of the Patrician order. Thus the victory was, after ages of perpetual contest, at last decided in favour of the democratic party. Every one has read the evils which Patri-

cian ambition, and popular fury and licentiousness, successively entailed upon the republic, and which at last effected the annihilation of that form of government. The bloody proscriptions of Marius, and Sylla, the first of the popular, the latter of the Patrician party, are facts of universal notoriety. The contest, in fine, was not extinguished, but with the extinction of the republic. The Patricians viewed the loss of what they called their constitutional rights with a regret, equal to the indignation with which the people had long suffered the privation of their's. On every election of a Consul, or other interesting occasion, the old animosities broke out afresh, and the two opposite factions exerted themselves with all their vigour. Each one arranged himself under their different banners as it best suited his interests ; and the distinction of rank was less regarded than the prospect of emolument or advantage. Such Patricians as aimed to attain to power through popular interest, espoused the Plebeian cause, and declared themselves the friends of the people, while many Plebeians attached themselves, through similar motives, to the Patrician party. Cæsar, although of the Patrician rank, was the man of the people, while Pompey was the idol of the senate, the great abettor of the Patrician cause, and the powerful supporter of its interests. They were both of them at the head of powerful armies ; and Pompey, although older than Cæsar, had married his daughter ; but no ties of alliance, or consanguinity, can extinguish the spirit of

party, or annulate ambition. No one is ignorant of the termination of those unhappy contests, which was nothing less than the extinction of the liberties of the Romans; if, indeed, a continual state of tumult, discord, insecurity, and compulsive military service, can be called liberty. This, however, is what writers have dignified with that name. After the defeat of Pompey, on the plains of Pharsalia, Cæsar, seeing himself at the head of almost the whole military force of the republic, soon found means to overbear all opposition, and was declared perpetual dictator, B. C. 46; an office which conferred regal power and authority, and only wanted the regal title. The last effort of the Patrician party, was the assassination of Cæsar in the senate. His nephew, Octavius, afterwards surnamed Augustus, and his friend, Mark Anthony, stood forth the avengers of his murder; and having defeated the conspirators at Philippi, associated Lepidus to them, and so formed the second triumvirate, and Lepidus, Octavius, and Mark Anthony, conjointly governed the empire. The history of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, the celebrated queen of Egypt, not less famous for her vices than for her extraordinary beauty and brilliant accomplishments, is too well known to be brought forward to inspection here, any more than the transactions of the civil war between Octavius Cæsar, and Mark Anthony, which having terminated in the defeat and death of the latter, as well as of the beautiful and accom-

plished Cleopatra, the last of the royal race of the Ptolemies, and in the reduction of Egypt to a Roman province; Octavius, without either associate or rival, reigned with distinguished reputation sole emperor of the Romans.

The singular policy and prudence with which Augustus established his sovereignty over the Romans, might serve as a model of political skill; and the whole tenor of his long and illustrious reign shews him to have been a consummate politician. Indeed, perhaps, never was any man more perfectly skilled in the art of governing mankind. Fully convinced of the predilection of the Romans for republican government, and of their attachment to republican forms, he did not endeavour to abolish the offices and forms of the republic; but concerted matters so well as to unite them in his own person, and always professing the greatest deference and respect for the senate, left it only so much power as he found consistent with his own. Of all his political measures, the most masterly was, his taking upon himself the government only for the term of ten years, at the expiration of which term he gave public notice of his intention to abdicate; and having dexterously managed his affairs, and made sure of a great majority in the senate, at the pressing solicitations of that body, and of the whole Roman people, he condescended to reassume the reins of government for a second term of ten years, and this farce he repeated, until he saw

his government firmly established, and every idea of opposition effaced from the minds of his subjects.

Thus we have seen the discordant factions of the Patricians and Plebeians, after having long agitated the republic, burst forth at last into those civil wars which convulsed every part of its extensive dominions, and more than once drenched Rome with the blood of her citizens, and which finally terminated in the extinction of the republican government, and the establishment of a monarchy, which seems to have been the most proper form of government for so extensive an empire, and composed of so many different nations. If experience, founded on facts, be admitted as a basis of reasoning, monarchy, when the sceptre is in the hand of a prudent and benevolent prince, is preferable to a republican government. Rome made the experiment, and had no reason to regret the change; for under the equitable and pacific reign of Augustus, her citizens and the whole empire enjoyed more tranquillity and security, more political and civil happiness, than had ever been experienced during the whole period of the existence of the republic. A spectacle now exhibited itself which mankind had never seen before, the whole civilized world united in one vast political system. France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, Switzerland and Belgium, Greece, and all the other countries which compose the whole of the Ottoman empire, both in Europe

and Asia, with Egypt and all the northern parts of Africa, which now constitute the empire of Morocco, and the states of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, all under the dominion of Rome: all those extensive countries united in one vast empire, and enjoying a profound tranquillity, under the government of an emperor, prudent, just, and pacific, who had the good sense to see that his own interests, and those of his people, were inseparable, afforded a prospect which the human mind must delight to contemplate, and which formed a striking contrast with the turbulent and unsettled state of the Roman world, while under the republican system. Historians descant in a rhetorical stile on the purer ages of the republic, the liberties of the citizens, and the loss of Roman freedom, when Julius Cæsar acquired, or as they term it, usurped the sovereignty under the title of Perpetual Dictator; and still more when that sovereignty was firmly established by Augustus; but let us ask those declaimers in what the liberty of republican Rome consisted. Was it in the compulsory enrolment of every citizen for ten years of military service, a period so considerable in the short duration of human life? Was it in the constant liability to be called out to those bloody and destructive wars, the narratives of which fill the pages of Roman history, and to be subject for so long a time to martial law, and all the hardships and dangers of a military life? Was it in tumult, civil dissensions, and party feuds? or was

it in the privilege of disturbing their own tranquillity, and that of the whole world, that the boasted liberty of the Roman people consisted? Let us not be misled by the florid declamations of historians. Truth may be disguised in various manners. It is not always necessary for that purpose to substitute downright falsehood; a little diversity of colouring in the picture, will sometimes alter the representation. A little exaggeration, or misrepresentation, will in some cases, have a powerful effect in creating false appearances and inculcating erroneous ideas. In whatever colours rhetorical declamation may paint Roman liberty, under the republican government, the plain fact appears to have been, that it principally consisted in the liberty enjoyed by the rich in oppressing the poor; a privilege which has, in several countries, been dignified with the sacred name of liberty. The whole history of the Roman republic plainly shews, that the principal object of the Senate, and the whole Patrician order, was the depression of the people, and to this end their systems of politics had a constant tendency. This was one of the causes why the Romans were engaged in continual hostilities; for the Senate well knew, that while the people were constantly engaged in foreign wars, they would be less attentive to the assertion of their rights. The Senate, in order to turn the attention of the people from the contemplation and redress of their grievances, had only to determine on a

war. The *Senatus Consultum*, or decree of the Senate, was brought before the people, whose privilege it was to determine finally on what was proposed by the Senatorial body. Some eloquent orator ascending the rostrum, harangued the citizens, painted in glowing colours the damage the republic had sustained, and the insults offered to the majesty of the Roman people. This was enough ; those high sounding expressions, the glory of the republic, and the majesty of the Roman people, constituted the political charm ; the magical incantation, which operated with an irresistible influence on the minds of a brave and warlike, but thoughtless people, who inconsiderately voted those wars, in which they were to fight and bleed, while their Patrician rulers were accumulating riches, power, and honor. Thus, while the supreme power of the Roman republic seemed ultimately to reside in the people, they were, in reality, no more than an engine in the hands of their rulers, who, by their electioneering intrigues, and the magic of their eloquent orations, rendered them entirely subservient to their purposes, and as much at their disposal as a set of puppets are at the command of the shew-master.

At this remarkable period, when the Roman constitution was changed from the republican to the monarchical form ; when the empire had attained to its highest pitch of aggrandizement and extent ; and when the world reposed, in profound tranquillity, under its powerful sway,

the enquiring mind is naturally desirous of investigating the manners of the Romans, and the modes of social life among those celebrated masters of the world.

The state of society among the Romans, was, in many respects, extremely different from what is seen among the nations of modern Europe. In those countries, each individual not possessing property, must procure his livelihood by his own industry and personal exertions; and he must also contribute to the support of the government which affords him protection. The taxes are levied either on property in possession, or on the different articles of necessity, convenience, or luxury; so that every individual must contribute to the state in proportion either to his possessions or expenditure. Such was also, in some measure, the financial arrangements of the Romans in regard to the inhabitants of the provinces or conquered countries; but the case was far different with those who enjoyed the privilege of Roman citizens. In the infancy of Rome, her citizens were few in number, and her territories of small extent, consisting only of her seven hills, and the adjacent marshes adjoining to the Tyber. The state must consequently have been exceeding poor. We are not, at this distance of time, able to ascertain perfectly in what manner the public expenditure of the state was supported, during the reigns of the seven kings of Rome, and in the primitive ages of the republic. No historical documents now exist,

which detail, with accuracy, the financial arrangements of those early times. The Romans, however, at first, by slow and gradual advances, and afterwards by the most rapid career of victory and conquest, extended their dominions in the manner already observed; and provinces and kingdoms became tributary to the republic. Those tributes were paid, part in specie, and part in produce: Sicily produced corn and wine. Egypt furnished corn; and all the conquered countries transmitted a certain portion of their respective produce to Rome. The agrarian law, so desired by the Roman people, could never be established; but a part, at least, of the tributes of the conquered countries was divided among the poorer class of Roman citizens. From the time of the defeat and capture of Perseus, King of Macedonia, to the reign of Augustus Cæsar, the Roman citizens were entirely free from taxation. Mr. Gibbon states the annual amount of the tributes paid by the provinces at twenty millions sterling; but does not make it clear, whether the corn, wine, oil, bacon, &c. ought to be included in this calculation, or not. It is, however, the opinion of many historical critics, that the tributary provisions ought not to be included, and that the provinces paid above that sum in specie. When Rome was arrived at the meridian of her power, and all the countries from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, and from the Danube to the deserts of Africa, poured their tributes into her coffers, the distributions

were so copious as to suffice for the support of the inferior classes of the citizens. A certain quantity of money, corn, wine, oil, bacon, and other articles, was distributed to those citizens, who, from the smallness of their property, were entitled to receive it. Those distributions, for a time, were made at stated periods, quarterly, monthly, &c. according to the exigency of circumstances; but in process of time they were made daily. Public ovens were constructed, and instead of quarterly, monthly, or weekly distributions of corn, &c. a certain quantity of bread, wine, &c. was delivered daily to such of the citizens as could legally claim it; and thus the wants of a proud, lazy, and improvident people were supplied. These tributary distributions were, undoubtedly, first brought into use by the Senate, in order to keep the factious multitude in humour, and to efface from the minds of the Plebeians the idea of an agrarian law; and, indeed, it was a more effectual method of retaining them in an absolute dependance on the great; whereas an equal division of the lands of the republic would have had a direct and necessary tendency to render them independent. The factious demagogues, who advanced themselves to power and honor by popular favor, or had formed such an expectation, exerted their influence to procure some increase in those tributary donations, so that, in process of time, the very poorest of the Roman citizens were exempted from the necessity of labour: but that heteroge-

neous assemblage of people which composed the mass of the inhabitants of Rome, as of every other great metropolis, stood in a different predicament. These were obliged to support themselves by their industry, on the property they possessed. The labour and trade of Rome were almost wholly carried on by slaves and strangers; and the provincial merchants and industrious mechanics, who resorted to Rome, and formed the mass of its inhabitants, frequently accumulated immense fortunes. This method of supporting the poorer class of the Roman citizens was followed in the other cities of the empire; each of which was in this respect an epitome of the capital; and although this mode of collecting and distributing the provincial tributes must have been exceedingly inconvenient, subject to many fluctuations, and productive of tedious details, it continued as long as the empire existed, or at least as long as it flourished. In the primitive ages of the republic, the cloathing of the Romans, like every thing else in Rome, was exceedingly plain, simple, and uniform: a plain white toga was the universal dress of the Plebeians; the toga of the equestrian order was fringed with a narrow border of purple: and the Patricians were distinguished by a broad border of the same colour; but the robe of the commander of their armies was entirely of purple. From this uniform mode of dress, in the first ages of the republic, there were scarcely any instances of deviation; but in proportion

as riches increased, the varied elegances of attire kept pace with every other kind of luxury, until at last, especially under the imperial government, they exceeded all bounds. The employment of the grandees of Rome was taking the air in the suburbs, with their splendid equipages and numerous retinues, frequenting the theatres and other public places. The public baths were the principal places of resort for the poorest classes of the people. The public games and shews of the circus were a splendid amusement for all ranks, and afforded ample means to the proud and lazy Romans of passing their time. Indeed there was never any other city, in either the ancient or modern world, which afforded such splendid exhibitions, nor any other government so attentive to provide amusements for its subjects. It was by these methods the rulers kept the people in humour. It was invariably the policy of the Senate to keep the people continually engaged in war abroad, and employed in amusements at home. The splendor of the public games and shews, and especially the superb triumphs of their generals and victorious armies, tended to inspire the Roman people with the most exalted ideas of the grandeur of the republic; and so long as they were dazzled with pompous exhibitions, sumptuous feasts, and brilliant diversions, and amused with the idea of the invincible courage of their armies, the glory of the republic, and the majesty

of the Roman people, they suffered themselves to be governed as their rulers pleased.

The Senate, however, in which the government was constitutionally vested, although it retained its ostensible authority, could not, by all those artifices, retain its real power. Factionous leaders arose, who gained an influence among the people, which gave them an ascendancy over the Senate itself. A change of circumstances had produced a change of manners, which influenced the whole system of the state. After the spoils of Asia had enriched Rome, exorbitant wealth corrupted the sober morals of her citizens, and the Romans were no longer the same people. Corruption not only reigned in every department of the administration, but riches, being considered as the means of obtaining the luxuries of life, were the object of universal pursuit. The Romans were no more those rigid patriots, who, at all times, and on all occasions, were ready to sacrifice their own private interests to those of the commonwealth. Avarice now corrupted their morals, and altered their manners; and private emolument was invariably preferred before the public good. Rome, where, during the primitive ages, every thing was plain and simple, where nothing merely ornamental was held in esteem, but every thing appreciated according to its utility, was become the seat of splendor, of opulence, and luxury, which daily encreased, and at last rose to a pitch

of which the history of the world affords no similar instance. This mixture of Asiatic luxury, with Roman ambition, gave an increased vigour to the different factions which had always existed in the republic. Many of the citizens of Rome equalled sovereign princes in opulence and splendor, and were enabled to pursue the same methods of acquiring an influence over the people, which the Senate had so long and so successfully practised; and the heterogeneous mass of the Roman populace were ready to follow any leader who entertained them with sumptuous feasts, and distributed large sums of money among a lazy and factious multitude. The Roman soldiery, ever ready to follow the standard of a Marius or a Sylla, a Cæsar or a Pompey, an Octavius or a Mark Anthony, became the soldiers of a party, and devoting themselves to the interests of some factious Demagogue, forgot that they were citizens and soldiers of the republic. In this depraved state of national character and manners, it is no wonder that the discordant factions, which had so long agitated the commonwealth, at last burst forth in a volcano, which almost threatened the annihilation of Rome, and actually terminated in the extinction of the republic system of government.

The Roman power, excepting some trifling conquests made under the Emperors, had attained to the zenith of its greatness; and the empire had acquired its full extent at the time

when the abolition of the republican, and the establishment of the imperial government took place; but whether the city had attained to its highest degree of population, extent, and opulence, is somewhat problematical. No historical documents exist, which determine this point; but if we reason from appearances, from general circumstances, and uniform experience of moral and political causes and effects, and on these principles hazard a conjecture, we may suppose that the imperial city had not reached the ultimate point of its extent or population. It is not, however, improbable, that this might be the æra of her greatest opulence. Rome had employed near 700 years in subduing and plundering the world, and had concentrated within her walls the accumulated wealth of the most opulent nations. She was now arrived at the termination of her acquisitions, and was in the first age of her dissipation. Excepting the provincial tributes, the spoils of nations had, in a great measure, ceased to flow into her coffers, and her armies had ceased so frequently to return laden with plunder. Wars now became less frequent, and there were no enemies to conquer who possessed any thing that could enrich the conquerors. From these circumstances, it seems reasonable to suppose, that the age immediately succeeding this long continued scene of predatory acquisition, was the time when Rome possessed the greatest mass of wealth. Afterwards, when the channels of acquisition

were in a great measure exhausted, and every mode of dissipation and extravagant expence daily gaining ground, a considerable part of the wealth concentrated in Rome, would necessarily begin to flow back into the provinces which, by their industry, administered to the luxury of the metropolis. The reverse is the case in the capitals of modern Europe. In these, commerce and wealth increase in proportion as luxury increases. But Rome was not commercial. Her wealth was not acquired by commerce, but by war and conquest, by rapine and spoil; nor does it appear, that Rome, even in her most flourishing and most pacific ages, was ever a very mercantile city. Alexandria was the grand emporium of Roman commerce. Pliny observes, how much the trade of India, carried on by the port of Alexandria, drained the wealth of Rome; and it appears by a multiplicity of circumstances, that the commerce of the imperial city was generally of such a nature, as tended rather to diminish, than augment her riches, so that, although Rome was exceedingly embellished, and, perhaps, enlarged under the emperors, it does not seem very probable that her opulence was ever increased after the dictatorship of Julius Cæsar, or, at least, after the reign of Augustus. And, whatever might be the condition of the vast collective mass of people who inhabited Rome, it is beyond all manner of doubt, that notwithstanding the immense riches of some overgrown individuals, a very great part of the Roman citizens

were poor, as plainly appears from the calculations which have been transmitted to us of the number of poor citizens, both in the metropolis and other cities of the empire, who were supported by the tributary donations.

The extinction of Carthage, 606 years after the building of Rome, 184 years after the conquest of the Persian empire by the Macedonians, and about 146 years before the Christian æra, constitutes the memorable epoch, from which the colossal power of Rome might date its commencement, and the event from which her immense opulence originated; although it was the conquest of the Greek kingdoms of Macedonia, Syria, &c. which actually poured into her coffers, that enormous mass of wealth which produced a total change in the manners of her citizens. Rome, by the destruction of Carthage, her potent rival, had risen superior to all her enemies, and had little left to do, but to proceed from conquest to conquest, and soon became rich with the spoils of the nations she subdued. The conquest of Macedonia, and the Grecian dominions of Asia, introduced the luxury of Asia along with its treasures, and a taste for luxury and splendor, became universally prevalent in Rome. From the time of the first triumvirate of Julius Cæsar, Pompey, and M. Crassus, or a little before that period, the splendid and costly feasts of the Romans, their pompous equipages, their numerous retinues, the magnificence of their public exhibitions, and

the dazzling splendor of their triumphs, would far exceed the bounds of credibility, were they not unanimously attested by historians of unquestionable veracity, and the authenticity of their relations confirmed by a thousand corroborating coincidences, which stamp upon them characters of truth, which cannot be called in question. Accurate descriptions of all these things are now extant, written by Authors who were perfectly acquainted with every circumstance. The things themselves were of too public a nature to be liable to misrepresentation, and consequently the authors who have described them, could not be exposed to the danger of misinformation or mistake; nor could they have the effrontery to impose upon the world fictitious representations of things of such universal notoriety. From the time of the first triumvirate to the subversion of the empire, the Roman history is far more luminous than that of any other ancient nation, by reason of the flourishing state of the empire, and the celebrity of the events which took place in it, in connection with a multiplicity of collateral circumstances, as well as on account of the number of writers, not only historians, but poets, orators, and moralists, who all make frequent allusions to the general, political, and moral circumstances of the Roman people.

If luxury, like a torrent, rushed into Rome as soon as she had by conquest and rapine amassed the wealth of the plundered world, we must at

least contemplate with pleasure the progress of arts, science, and literature, among her citizens. If we must condemn the corruption of their morals, we cannot, at the same time, refrain from applauding and admiring the improvement of their intellectual faculties. In conquering Greece the Romans imbibed a taste for the arts of that country, and Grecian learning and elegance, as well as Asiatic luxury, were introduced among them. All the citizens of Rome, who had any expectation of advancement in public life, completed their studies in the schools of philosophy and rhetoric at Athens, or other cities of Greece. No Roman, of rank or opulence, could be found who did not possess the advantages of a learned education; and Rome soon rivalled Athens itself in the different departments of literature. Rhetoric was the favourite study of the Romans, and had indeed, ever since the establishment of the republican government, been considered as the most important part of a Roman education. As all the offices of the republic were elective, and as every public affair, after having been debated in the Senate, was proposed to the people whose decision was final, eloquence of speech was essentially necessary to those who desired to qualify themselves for offices in the state, or indeed to acquire any kind of distinction. To shine in the Senate, by a dazzling and brilliant eloquence, and to excite the passions and command the suffrages of the people by bold, persuasive, and energetic harangues, was the great

object of literary exertion, and the summit of perfection among the Romans. After the flowers of Grecian rhetoric had been engrafted on the simple and manly energy of Roman eloquence, the oratorial art had attained to its *ne plus ultra* of perfection. This was in the time of Cicero, who, together with Julius Cæsar, M. Anthony, and many others, formed such a constellation of eloquent orators, as had never before adorned the Senate, or the rostrum. Greece and Rome were the native soil of eloquence, where it was first cultivated, and where it was carried to the ultimate point of perfection. The popular form of their governments rendered it absolutely necessary. Splendid rhetoric and military talents were the high roads to wealth and honor among both the Greeks and Romans : and it is observable, that although the experience and researches of the moderns have made many great discoveries in physical, mathematical, and mechanical knowledge, yet none have excelled them in elegant writing, and it is questioned whether any have equalled them in the art of speaking. In the modern governments, where every thing is more regulated by fixed principles, rhetoric is not so necessary to a person in public life as it was under the popular systems of Greece and Rome.

In considering the powerful effects of ancient oratory, our curiosity is naturally excited to examine from what principles and circumstances it derived so extraordinary a force, in moving

the passions, and swaying the resolutions and actions of men. We may reasonably suppose that the effects of ancient rhetoric, as well as those of ancient poetry, may have been painted in the most glowing colours, and transmitted to us in a stile somewhat exaggerated; but, however, when every allowance is made for the exaggerations of writers, we cannot but acknowledge that eloquence had a power and effect among the ancients which we cannot imagine it would, in its greatest perfection, have among the moderns. This must undoubtedly be ascribed to the different state of the human mind in ancient and modern times. Whatever notions we may have of the state of science, literature, and general information among the ancients, we must consider those advantages as limited to a small number of individuals of genius, rank, and opulence. The philosophers, poets, and orators of Greece and Rome, made a splendid figure in the annals of literature; and the celebrity of their names with the elegance of their literary compositions, impose upon our minds an exalted, and in one sense, a very erroneous idea of the learning of the Greeks and Romans. Many of their men of letters merited all the applause which after-ages have bestowed upon them; but it is beyond every possibility of doubt, that the great mass of the people were in a state of unlettered ignorance. This was, and must necessarily have been, the case with the populace of every country before the inven-

tion of printing. Before that important æra, which stands so conspicuous in the history of the human intellect, it was impossible that knowledge should be diffused among the vulgar. The time required to write manuscripts rendered them too dear to be purchased by persons in narrow circumstances; and learning being confined to so small a number of individuals, and books so exceedingly dear, were circumstances which had a constant and reciprocal influence on the general state of literature, the effects of which it was impossible to prevent or remedy; for the excessive scarcity and dearness of books rendered the acquisition of learning impossible to the bulk of the people, and this circumstance confining the knowledge of letters to a small number of persons, and those generally of an elevated rank, or distinguished opulence, there were none to write books or to teach the use of them, but such as would expect to be well paid. These circumstances, reciprocally and necessarily operating, were an insurmountable obstacle to the literary pursuits of the lower classes, and powerfully concurred to place the acquisition of knowledge out of the reach of the great mass of mankind throughout the world.

These observations will enable us to make a just estimate of the general state of intellectual improvement, among all the civilized nations of antiquity, and from evident and well known circumstances, to draw this infalible conclusion; that notwithstanding the boasted learning of the

Greeks and Romans, those celebrated instructors of mankind, the great mass of the people of both those famous nations, were beyond comparison more ignorant than the lowest class of people in this and many other European countries, who can most of them at least read ; and even those who do not enjoy that advantage, acquire some degree of information by daily converse with those who have at least some tincture of learning ; for knowledge, like commerce, once put in motion, diffuses itself by innumerable channels, divided into an endless diversity of ramifications, and running in an infinity of directions.

This state of the human intellect, among the nations of antiquity, gave the ancient orators an advantage which those of modern times can never possess, and contributed, perhaps, more than any other circumstance, to give an extraordinary effect to their eloquence. The orators of Greece and Rome, in their popular assemblies, addressed a curious and inquisitive, but unlettered multitude, desirous of political information, but possessing few means of acquiring it, except from the mouths of their orators, and at the same time entertaining an exalted opinion of their own importance in the state. In our times there are so many channels of information, that few people are entirely ignorant concerning any subject of debate. The newspapers, circulated in almost every village, are now a channel of information open to every one ; and almost every

man either reads them, or hears something of their contents, when any political measure of importance is in debate. The public mind is then in some measure prepared; and if popular orations were made by our statesmen as among the Greeks and Romans, the previous information which the greatest part of the audience would possess would render their passions more difficult to rouse, and modern orators would find it more necessary to address the reason and understanding of their auditors. The people of our age would not, in general, make so hasty a decision as the Greek and Roman populace; they would rather be inclined to suspend their judgment till they had calmly considered the subject, and a number of papers and popular addresses would be circulated on both sides of the question; but the mass of the Greek and Roman citizens wanting those means of information which the moderns possess, had not the opportunity of discussing any political subject until they heard it delivered from the rostrum, exhibited in that point of view in which the orator chose to place it, painted in such colours as he pleased to give it, and the whole supported, seconded, and embellished by the most dazzling and energetic eloquence. The oration fell like a flash of lightning on the minds of the multitude; their passions were roused, their ears were flattered, and their reason overpowered with the reiterated sounds of the majesty of the people, the glory of the republic, the good of their coun-

try, and other phrases of a similar nature, of which politicians have always a suitable collection in store, and of which factious demagogues never fail to make use, in order to render the thoughtless multitude their instruments in the execution of their designs.

Having carried forward our observations on the celebrated republic of Rome, from its first establishment to the period of its extinction, when it assumed the monarchical form, and taken a retrospect of its origin and progress, in conjunction with a general view of the manners of its citizens, their poverty, simplicity, and patriotism in the first ages of the republic, and their luxury, splendor, and opulence in later times; an observer, who would turn his attention to the general condition of the human species, cannot dismiss the subject without contemplating the condition of a numerous and unhappy class of people, who composed a very considerable part of the inhabitants of the Roman dominions, and enquiring from what causes a state of life originated, which it is impossible to contemplate without horror.

In contemplating the enormous power and dazzling splendor of the Roman state, we must not forget that there always existed within its bosom a numerous and unfortunate class of human beings, who were excluded from every privilege of society, and from every blessing of life. It is computed by Mr. Gibbon that the slaves composed one half of the inhabitants of that

extensive empire ; and as the inhabitants of the Roman empire could not be fewer in number than those of modern Europe, which, by general calculation, amount to 120,000,000, consequently the number of Roman slaves could not be less than sixty millions ; a circumstance which exhibits, in the most striking point of view, the tyranny of man over man. Those unhappy beings, dependent on the caprice of imperious masters, and unprotected by the laws, had the most rigorous laws enacted against them, to which they were obnoxious for the slightest misdemeanors. The government, conscious of the hardships of their situation, considered them as a dangerous body of men, justly apprehended that their desperate condition might stimulate them to desperate measures, and therefore endeavoured by every method to depress them as much as possible. They were left entirely at the disposal of their masters, who might treat them in what manner they pleased. Every master was invested with an absolute authority and power over his slaves. He might torture, maim, or put them to death, in what manner soever his caprice or his cruelty dictated. He was amenable to no laws for his conduct towards them ; nothing could restrain his tyranny but the dictates of humanity within his own breast, or a sense of his own interest in their preservation. It is a melancholy consideration, that a state of slavery existed among all the nations of antiquity, of whom we have any knowledge, and

originated from various causes. One of these causes was the absolute power possessed by parents over their children, in several ancient nations, which authorised them to put their children to death, sell them into slavery, or dispose of them as they pleased. This detestable law, which rendered the parent the uncontrolled arbiter of the fate of their offspring, was among the first of the institutions, being established by Romulus, immediately after the foundation of Rome. It continued a considerable time in force among the Romans, and was almost general in the times of remote antiquity; except among the Jews, who, by their law, could not put their children to death without an appeal to the magistrates; nor was it permitted to sell any Hebrew to a foreign nation. The punishment of crimes was another source of slavery, as was also the insolvency of debtors. These punishments of criminality and insolvency were subject to different regulations in different countries; among the Jews the jubilee was a time of general release; in many other nations the slavery arising from those two circumstances was perpetual, and even the wives and children of the criminal, or the insolvent, were involved in his punishment. These were, in some measure, so many different causes, from whence originated the horrid system of rendering one man the property of another; but the capture of prisoners, in time of war, was the greatest and most fertile source of slavery, especially among the Ro-

mans. During the whole period of time in which the republican government of Rome existed, that restless state was engaged in continual hostilities with the surrounding nations; every victory, and every conquest augmented the number of Roman slaves; and as slavery was entailed from generation to generation, we cannot wonder at the extraordinary number of slaves in Rome, and other parts of the territories of the republic.

There are now no historical documents extant, which give any authentic information of the manner in which slaves were treated among the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and other nations of remote antiquity. We may, from the sacred writings, collect some knowledge of their treatment among the Jews, where they were not left entirely at the mercy of arbitrary and cruel masters: but, as human beings, although in a depressed situation, and as children of the universal parent, they were placed under the protection of the law, which, in many places, not only recommends, but absolutely enjoins the exercise of benevolence and compassion towards the bond slave and the stranger.

These repeated injunctions of universal benevolence in the Mosaical laws, most strikingly display the superior excellence of its moral doctrines, when compared with the institutions of the most celebrated Pagan legislators, and afford no unreasonable presumption in favour of its divine original.

If, however, we are ignorant of the manner in which slaves were treated in the nations just mentioned, historical evidence affords indisputable and melancholy proofs that this unfortunate class of mankind was used with extreme rigour among the Greeks and Romans, and especially the latter, as we have just observed. It is a shocking, but, perhaps, too just a reflection, which has been made by many judicious observers and accurate investigators of the history of mankind, that those nations which enjoyed the greatest share of freedom, have generally been the most cruel in the treatment of their slaves. If this be true, which, however, is not easy to prove, the circumstance can hardly have originated from the constitutional liberty of their respective governments, but must be ascribed to some other cause, difficult, and, perhaps, at this distance of time, impossible to trace.

The changes which happened in the political and moral circumstances of the Romans, however, effected a material change in the condition of slavery; and while we cannot but lament that the progressive aggrandizement of Rome, by her victorious arms, continually augmented the number of her slaves, we have at least the pleasure of observing, that the opulence and luxury introduced by her conquests, ameliorated exceedingly their condition. In the first age of the republic, while the Romans were indigent, but warlike, equally strangers to opulence and luxury, and intent upon acquisition rather than en-

joyment, the slaves were treated with extreme rigour, and were employed in the most laborious drudgery, in combination with every kind of hardship which can embitter human life. In the more advanced state of civilization, when the victories of Rome, and her conquest of the Asiatic kingdoms, as far as the Euphrates, had inspired her citizens with a taste for luxury and splendor, in proportion to their acquisition of wealth, and philosophy and literature had at the same time humanized their minds, the numerous body of Roman slaves soon began to experience the beneficial effects of the opulence and luxury of their masters. Instead of being worn out with painful labour and scanty food, great numbers of them were employed as agents and ministers of luxury in the capacity of cooks, confectioners, butlers, valets, and every other department in the houses of the Roman grandees, and, like the domestics in modern times, were as well fed and clothed as their masters. Instances are not wanting of three or four hundred of those well-fed slaves being maintained in some particular houses of the opulent Roman citizens.

It was a circumstance extremely favourable to the condition of slavery, that the public distributions of the provincial tributes, in the flourishing state of the republic, had placed the poorest Roman citizens above the necessity of labour or servitude. For as a citizen of Rome would have thought it a debasement to become a menial ser-

vant to a fellow-citizen, and as the public donations exempted them from the necessity of entering into such a state for subsistence, consequently the great and opulent were obliged to employ slaves and strangers as domestics; and the bulk of the domestics, in the houses of the great, both in the metropolis and other parts of the Roman dominions, were slaves. Another cause might also contribute, in no small degree, to soften the condition of slavery. It must be supposed, that the accumulated posterity of slaves must, in process of time, have become exceedingly numerous. In the early ages of Rome, the slaves who were almost entirely prisoners, taken in war, were of daring minds and of an untractable disposition. Those fierce and warlike barbarians, inferior indeed in discipline and military skill, were not inferior in daring and enterprising courage to the Romans themselves; and accustomed, as they had been, to a life of military enterprise and lawless rapine, could not be expected patiently to submit to a state of laborious drudgery, under tyrannical and imperious masters; and on that account, they were kept as much as possible in a state of depression, and exposed to every hardship. In after times the vast body of Roman slaves did not consist so much of prisoners actually taken in war, as of the posterity of those unfortunate persons who had undergone that fate; and their descendants, being long domesticated among the Romans, and familiarised with their manners, did not in-

herit the resentment and ungovernable disposition of their ancestors, but became, when treated with lenity, tractable and faithful servants ; a circumstance which could not fail of disposing the minds of their masters to kindness and indulgence ; and several instances are met with of fidelity and attachment in the slaves, and of kindness in the masters. In the latter times, the affranchisement of slaves, sometimes as a reward for faithful services, oftener perhaps, for other reasons, was grown so common, that the senate thought it necessary to restrain this indulgence of masters. As a slave had no country of his own, he was, after his affranchisement, deemed free of the country of which his master was a citizen ; and this circumstance might probably induce several masters to give freedom to their slaves, in order to have at their devotion a number of freemen, who, through motives of gratitude or interest, commonly attached themselves to the party of their former masters. However, as affranchisement from slavery conferred also the freedom of the city, the republic enacted laws to exclude those affranchised slaves, and their descendants, to a certain number of generations, from the public offices of the state.

This amelioration of the condition of slavery is one of the most pleasing consequences that flowed from the increased opulence and luxury of Rome, and a circumstance on which the compassionate mind must delight to reflect. Indeed it gives pleasure, in reading the Roman history,

to find that before the extinction of the republic, some opulent citizens, such as T. P. Atticus, M. Crassus, and others, bestowed a liberal education on such of their slaves, as manifested an appearance of genius and talents; and we are informed, that Crassus acquired a considerable part of his immense riches by giving an excellent education to his slaves, and then disposing of them to great advantage; for a slave of abilities and learning was held in great esteem, and valued at a high price. Such were employed as stewards and agents in almost every kind of business, and many of them taught grammar, and other rudiments of literature and the sciences. Many even of the physicians and the apothecaries of Rome were slaves; and there cannot exist a more evident proof, that valuable slaves were, at this period, highly esteemed and well treated, than that in cases of the greatest danger, by sickness or accident, the grandees of Rome frequently entrusted their lives in the hands of slaves.

Notwithstanding the splendor, opulence, elegance of taste, and literary attainments of the Romans, we find in the general delineation of their manners, even in the most polished ages, some traits which do not appear, to a modern observer, the characteristics of a civilized people. The delight which the Romans always took in the combats of the gladiators and slaves, appear in a disgusting view to the eye of humanity. Such, however, was the general taste

of the people ; and the more enlightened and humane gave way to its prevalence. Those horrid amusements were, no doubt, originally instituted by the Roman rulers, for the purpose of inuring the people to the scenes of blood, and exciting them to delight in war and slaughter ; and long custom had rendered them agreeable to the multitude, and almost an essential part of their political system. Their cruel treatment of their prisoners of war is another circumstance disgraceful to the Roman name ; but this species of barbarity was common to all the nations of antiquity, almost without exception, and strikingly displays the superior humanity of the moderns. Some instances of a contrary conduct are found among the ancients, of which Alexander's treatment of the Persian captives is one of the most illustrious. Those, however, are so rare, that they appear as deviations from their fixed principles. Of all the nations of antiquity, the civilized and highly polished Romans were, perhaps, the most uniformly cruel in this respect. Scarcely any examples are found in their history of generous treatment to their prisoners, especially during the existence of the republic. The sovereign princes, and principal commanders of the enemy, who had the misfortune to fall into their hands, after having been exposed, laden with chains, to adorn the triumphs of their conquerors, were generally condemned to a cruel death ; while those of inferior rank were obliged either to destroy one another in a single combat,

or to fight with wild beasts, for the amusement of the barbarous multitude, who boasted of the title of Roman citizens, or else were condemned to perpetual slavery. If a modern European had seen the splendor of a Roman triumph, whatever idea he might have conceived of the power and grandeur of the republic, in viewing the military pomp of such a spectacle, what would have been his feelings in contemplating the unhappy lot of so many warriors, perhaps not less brave, although less fortunate, than their insulting conquerors? When the barbarity of the Romans towards their prisoners of war is compared with the humanity of the civilized nations of modern Europe in this respect, the contrast is strikingly in favour of the latter, and displays a horrid and disgusting picture of the inhumanity of the ancients, and especially of the Romans, those polished masters of the ancient world.

The picture here given is, perhaps, as just and as accurate a delineation of the political and social state of ancient Rome, in a general view, as any historical documents now extant can furnish; to attempt a more particular investigation would be more tedious than useful. Rome was at this period in the meridian of her power and greatness, and the civilized world, after ages of war and bloodshed, revolutions, and political convulsions, from the earliest period of historical record, reposing in profound peace under the shade of her victorious banners; such was the

state of things when the world was about to experience a revolution of a different nature from any it had undergone before, a total and fundamental revolution in the religious and moral ideas of mankind. A most important event was about to take place, which was to influence the condition of mankind to the latest posterity, and to act with undiminished force to the end of time. The christian revelation was about to be announced.

The whole world was at this time immersed in the grossest religious errors; and, except the Jews, and; perhaps, we may add the Persians, the whole collective mass of mankind was bewildered in the intricate maze of unintelligible mythologies, and infatuated with the absurdities of idolatry. The Persians, as far as we can collect from history, had never adopted any kind of idol worship, nor admitted any representations of the Supreme Being, except the sun, and his symbol, the fire; for which they had a particular veneration, as the lively emblem of him who is the great Creator and Source of Light. And, unless this emblematical worship be deemed idolatry, the Persians cannot be classed among the idolatrous nations. In whatever light this superstitious veneration of the fire may be considered, it is, however, an unquestionable fact, that the Persians, like the Jews, wherever their arms prevailed, abolished the worship of all such representations of the Supreme Being as were made by human art and

workmanship. Xerxes demolished the temples of Greece, and destroyed the images of their gods, nor was he more indulgent to the Babylonians, but plundered and destroyed the celebrated temple of Belus, which Cyrus, Cambyzes, and Darius Hystaspes, undoubtedly from political motives, had spared. The religion of the Persians seems to have approached nearer to deism than idolatry; or, perhaps, it might most probably be deemed a medium between the two systems. The philosophers of other nations, especially the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, had formed divers systems, and adopted different opinions. Some of them had conceived the most exalted ideas of the essence and attributes of the supreme and universal Being; but the multitude in every nation, the great mass of mankind throughout the world, was wholly unacquainted with those sublime speculations, and entertained the most absurd ideas of divine things.

From the time when men began to exercise their thinking faculties, notwithstanding the weakness of their reason, they could not fail of perceiving the mysterious circumstances of their existence. They would naturally reflect on the situation in which they saw themselves placed, and endeavour to investigate their origin, and to discover the cause which had given existence to man, and to the world, in which his residence was fixed. And they could not avoid reflecting on the shortness and precarious nature of hu-

man life. After powerful monarchies had been established, had aggrandized themselves by conquest, and then had fallen a prey to other conquerors; after a variety of revolutions had astonished the inquisitive minds of those who attentively observed the fluctuations of all human affairs, and the innumerable and ceaseless vicissitudes of all things here below; after experience and observation had convinced mankind of the instability of all human power and greatness, men would naturally be still more excited to discover the first great cause which had given existence to the world, and continued to govern it with an irresistible control. The uniform experience of mankind would convince them that the days of man are numbered, and the period of mortal existence fixed by a power whose will is irresistible; and that neither crowns, nor sceptres, nor the highest exaltation of human greatness, can procure an exemption from the universal law, nor prolong life beyond the limits assigned by that Being, who possesses an unlimited control over universal nature. These considerations would naturally prompt the contemplative mind to enquire, whether death were a total extinction of being, or whether it were only a change, after which man was still to exist with continued or renovated powers in some future state.

While the philosophical part of mankind endeavoured to trace out those great truths, the most untutored capacity would discover that

some great and universal cause existed, from which all things originated ; some powerful Being, who, with an absolute sway, governs and disposes all things according to his will : and men would consequently think it their interest, as well as their duty, to render him some kind of homage and adoration.

In a general view of the history of the human mind, the prevailing systems of the philosophers of antiquity form a striking part of the picture, and shew how far unassisted reason is capable of advancing in divine science, though they differed in their ideas and forms of worship. We have already remarked the zabaism of the Chaldæans, consisting in the worship of the celestial bodies, a system which had an extensive spread, and was received in Egypt and in most parts of Asia. Mankind, in all ages, conscious of their own unworthiness, to approach the throne of the Supreme Being, felt their need of some Mediator : and the Babylonians, whose principal study was astronomy, imagined the heavenly bodies to be inferior deities, acting as mediators between the All-perfect Being and men his creatures ; and consequently it soon became an essential part of their religion to endeavour to render them propitious by sacrifices and the performance of certain rites. The religion of the Egyptians was a tissue of allegorical representations. They exhibited the divine attributes, as well as the phenomena of nature, under the veil of allegory and symbol, and this

gave rise to the worship of different animals, especially of the ox, the most useful and most beneficial to man of all the brute creation. Heracles, the Egyptian, supposed to have been nearly a contemporary with Moses, as also Zoroaster, the Persian; and among the Greeks, Orpheus, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Melissus, Pherecydes, Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle; and many others, found, in the necessity of invincible reason, one eternal and infinite Being, the Parent of the Universe. "All these men's opinions," says Lactantius, "amount to this; that they agree upon one Providence, whether the same be nature, or light, or reason, or understanding, or fate, that is the same, which we call God." In regard to the origin of the universe, some believed it to be an eternal emanation of the Deity; of this opinion Aristotle was, if not the founder, at least the principal supporter; but Plato, and the whole sect of the Platonists, supposed it to have been created at some particular period of time, according to an archetype or model eternally existing in the divine mind.

Anaxagoras, a philosopher of Clazomena, and preceptor to Pericles, the Athenian hero, held the unity of the Supreme Being, and was looked on in Greece as an Atheist, because he denied that the stars and planets were gods. Vide *Plato, de leg.* P. 886. Anaxagoras maintained that the former were suns, and the latter habitable worlds. So far is the system of a plu-

ality of worlds from being of modern origin, as many imagine.

On the other side, Anaximander, who was contemporary with Pythagoras, and lived about 600 years before Christ, and in the time of the Babylonian captivity, was the first we know of who denied the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, and pretended to account for every thing by the action of an immense matter necessarily assuming all sorts of forms. His doctrine was embraced by Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, &c. and opposed by Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and a number of other great men. These two sects, the theists and the atheists, a long time divided Greece. Pyrrho then formed another sect, whose great principle was to doubt of every thing. This principle they carried to the highest pitch of extravagance, so far even as to maintain that every thing we see is an illusion, and life a perpetual dream. Zeno next founded the sect of the stoics. He maintained that the Supreme Being is an infinite and all-perfect intelligence; but that his essence is a pure æther, or, in other words, that God is material.

In regard to a future state, most of the philosophers of antiquity held the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, and their fall; and taught that all souls will be restored to their primitive state. This doctrine of the pre-existence of souls was held by some of the ancient Fathers. It is also supposed to have given rise to the doctrine of

transmigration, universally held by the Asiatics of old, as well as by most of them at this day, in those parts of Asia where the Mahometan religion does not prevail.

Although many of the philosophers, among the heathens, entertained tolerably just ideas of the essence and attributes of the Supreme Being, they had in general formed an erroneous opinion of his mode of governing the world; and, almost without exception, admitted a number of inferior Deities, to whom he had committed the government of the different departments of the universe. This doctrine is unequivocally taught by Aristotle, who says, "All must be referred to one principal and primitive Being, and to several other beings, governed in subordination to Him; and this (he says) is the genuine doctrine of the ancients." And Plutarch, one of the most learned of the ancients in the Pagan mythology, says, "As the sun is common to all the world, although called by different names in different places, so there is but one sole supreme mind, and one and the same Providence that governs the world, although he be worshipped under different names, and has appointed certain inferior powers for his ministers." Some suppose that this doctrine of the existence of inferior deities arose from mistaking the allegorical mode of representing the different attributes of the deity used by the Egyptians; others suppose it originated from man's consciousness of his own unworthiness and need of a

mediator, before the throne of the great Ruler of the universe, and that it first prevailed in Babylon, where the priests, being accustomed to the contemplation of the heavenly bodies, fixed on them as the established mediators between God and man. ' Among others, Dr. Russel seems to be of this opinion, and says, " that the substance of this doctrine, variously modelled, may be traced in most of the religious systems of the pagans, and that the twelve greater gods of the Greeks and Romans represent the seven planets, and the four elements, governing all in subordination to the one Great Supreme, according to the Chaldæan hypothesis."

While the philosophers were forming various hypotheses, and bewildering themselves in the maze of abstruse speculation, the great mass of mankind had neither leisure, inclination, nor abilities, for those disquisitions. Polytheism, however, was too well adapted to the depraved taste and capacities of the multitude; who were unable to comprehend the government and energy of an universal Being pervading all parts of the immense creation; and, perhaps, the same difficulty presenting itself to the minds of the philosophers, might, in no small degree, contribute to their general admission of the hypothesis of a number of inferior divinities ruling in the different departments of the world, in subordination to the one sovereign Being. The system of polytheism thus admitted by the philosophers,

and so well adapted to the conceptions of vulgar minds, was universally established in the pagan world, but with this distinction, that among the philosophers, polytheism was subordinate to theism. They generally acknowledged one supreme and universal Being, the father of gods and men, while the multitude lost the idea of one sovereign Being among a crowd of inferior deities. The poets adopted the system as furnishing a grand and beautiful machinery for the embellishment of their poems, and imagination multiplied gods without number. Every part of the universe was peopled with imaginary deities. Celestial, terrestrial, and infernal gods were created by the inventive fancy of the Greeks; household gods, gods of the rivers, of fountains, of the forest, and of the field, were admitted into the number; and satyrs, nymphs, and fawns, with the souls of deceased heroes, helped to compose the monstrous assemblage. Thus the mythologies of the pagans, especially of the Greeks and Romans, became complicated and unintelligible systems of mysterious absurdities, and composed a mere celestial phantasmagoria of ideal beings.

In what manner, and with what various modifications, the speculations of philosophers, and this variegated mass of poetical imagery, were interwoven in the popular religions of different pagan nations, it is impossible exactly to determine. Politicians varied the scenery according to the different moral and physical circumstances

of the people they had to govern; and consequently their systems were so various, and original ideas so disguised or distorted, that to trace them to their first principles, would be as impossible as it would be useless. But as the system of philosophers had little influence on the multitude, who were unable to comprehend them, and the fictions of the poets were no more than ideal exhibitions, existing only in the mind, the legislators and framers of religious systems, among the ancients, invented the method of instructing the people through the medium of the senses, by the use of visible misrepresentations, and this was the origin of idol-worship. Emblematical representations of the attributes of the Supreme Being are supposed to have been first used by the Egyptian priests, who covered all their knowledge under the veil of allegory, and expressed both their philosophical and theological ideas by hieroglyphical symbols. Some, however, rather suppose, that visible representations of the attributes of the Deity, or at least of subordinate divinities, were first invented at Babylon, and that idol worship originated in that city; but whether it took its rise from the Egyptians or Babylonians, is a problem of which the solution is equally difficult and useless; for it is certain that the hypothesis of a plurality of inferior deities governing the world in subordination to the one Great Supreme being generally admitted, the politicians and legislators of antiquity, considering that mankind are the most

powerfully affected by such things as immediately and forcibly strike the senses, caused statues to be erected as representations of those subordinate divinities ; and the institution of solemn festivals, with pompous sacrifices and ceremonies to their honour, inspired the people with veneration both for the ideal divinities and their material symbols ; and thus rivetted idolatry, as well as polytheism, in the minds of men.

But a distinction, already remarked, is to be made between the religion of the multitude and that of the philosophers, who acknowledged one Supreme, eternal, and self-existing Being, although they made no scruple of conforming to the established religious ceremonies of their respective countries, which they regarded only as political institutions, calculated to amuse the vulgar, and render the multitude more governable by being united with the bonds of religion. The testimonies of Eusebius, Lactantius, St. Augustine, and other fathers of the primitive church, unanimously prove this fact.

In the age immediately preceding the coming of Christ, the philosophy of Epicurus had gained the ascendancy at Rome. It was of an easy and accommodating kind, and suited the libertinism of a polite, but immoral age. Corruption of manners, and religious scepticism, were at their full height ; and most of the greatest and most learned men wavered between the theistical and atheistical systems ; among whom may be reck-

oned the illustrious Cicero, although he seems to incline to the former. Man, left to himself, without a guide, had lost himself in the labyrinth of speculation, and the imagination had launched out into all the extravagancies of which it is capable, when reason, overpowered, leaves it to run into wild exuberance.

Such a state of the moral and intellectual world as is here delineated, and no one will say that the picture is distorted, clearly points out the necessity of a Divine Revelation, which, by giving supernatural aid to the feeble efforts of human reason, might fix the wanderings of the mind, and furnish man with certain information concerning what it is so much his interest to know, his most important and everlasting concerns. This grand purpose was to be accomplished by the Christian Revelation, which was to instruct mankind in forming right notions of the Supreme Being, of his attributes and agency, of the means of pardon, and the most acceptable mode of worshipping Him. Of all the various revolutions which had ever taken place in the world, this was far the most important, and its effects the most wonderful, extensive, and durable. The rise and fall of the Assyrian, Persian, and Grecian empires, and the immense aggrandizement of Rome, were trifling events, which sink into insignificance when put into the scale of comparison with the establishment of Christianity, that great and important event which was destined to effect a fundamental revolution

in the ideas of mankind, and to produce a total change in the moral aspect of the world.

Every one is so well acquainted with the circumstances related in the gospel, that any mention of them here would be entirely misplaced. It is well known, that its first propagators, inspired with a courage and perseverance, which, in their circumstances, nothing earthly could be supposed to give, dispersed themselves into different countries to announce the glad tidings of salvation. In this attempt, too great for any human abilities, they met with all the difficulties and opposition that such an undertaking could be supposed to produce. Indeed it could not happen otherwise. Poor, despised, and illiterate, destitute of all human advantages, they undertook to propagate and establish a doctrine diametrically opposite to every religious opinion received and venerated among men; a doctrine, which militated in the highest degree against the passions as well as the prejudices of mankind; a doctrine, in fine, subversive of every religious establishment, and of every thing which from time immemorial had been revered and held sacred. The Christian religion was first preached at Jerusalem, which had been the theatre of Christ's passion, as well as of many of the principal actions of his life. Some converts were made, and an infant church established, in that metropolis of Judea; but the new system was rejected by the great body of the Jewish nation, as might indeed be expected. After their

cruel and unjust treatment of its Founder, during his life, there was little probability that they would, after his death, acknowledge him for their Prince and Saviour; especially, considering how much their minds were filled with the expectation of a martial and conquering Messiah, under whose victorious banners they should shake off the Roman yoke, and establish a powerful empire, like the Babylonians, Persians, &c. of old, or the Romans of that age; or, at least, restore their nation to its ancient splendor and ascendancy, under the prosperous reigns of David and Solomon. This being the general expectation of the priests, the rulers, and almost the whole body of the Jewish nation, it was in the highest degree improbable that they should acknowledge for their Messiah a person whom they had seen living in the most humble and indigent circumstances of humanity, and expiring in torments as a contemptible and seditious malefactor, in pursuance of the sentence which they themselves had passed, or at least procured to be unjustly passed upon him. The gospel dispensation, therefore, being rejected by the Jews, was carried among the Gentiles. Converts were made, and churches established, in almost every city of the Roman empire; in Antioch, Damascus, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, Alexandria, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and in Rome itself; where, according to the best historical information, the apostles, Peter and Paul, suffered martyrdom in the first imperial persecution under Nero,

who was the first Roman persecutor, and enacted a sanguinary decree against the Christians; avowedly not through enmity against their religious doctrine, but on an accusation of having set fire to the city, being desirous of removing the imputation of that horrid act from himself, by fixing it upon them. Christianity continued, however, to make a rapid progress, and some philosophers and men of learning saw good reason for embracing its doctrines, and following its precepts. The system soon acquired a new proof of its divine authority, in the well known destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation; an event circumstantially foretold by Christ about forty years before it took place. The circumstances of that scene of desolation and carnage are eloquently related by Flavius Josephus, who, being first a commander in that war, and afterwards a prisoner to the Romans, was perfectly acquainted, not only with the principal occurrences which took place in it, but also with the secret springs and causes from whence it originated; as he had many times attended in the great council at Jerusalem, in which the war was resolved on, and the necessary measures concerted for carrying it on with vigour. He had also been a spectator of all the occurrences which took place during the last siege of Jerusalem; and we must confess that he seems to have related things with great accuracy, and with a considerable degree of impartiality, al-

though we cannot be ignorant that he composed his celebrated works under Roman influence. The destruction of the temple, and entire desolation of the city of Jerusalem, afforded a strong argument in favour of Christianity. It was visible to mankind, that a signal judgment had fallen upon that people, and that, according to every appearance, their hopes of retrieving their national glory, and of acquiring a preponderancy in the political scale of nations, were for ever extinguished. These considerations, in connection with Christ's remarkable prophecy, and a number of other collateral circumstances, could not fail of making a deep impression on the minds of thinking men, who knew how to reflect and reason on moral causes and events. And as the dispersion of the Jews, and the extinction of their hopes of temporal sovereignty, formed at that time no small presumption in favour of Christianity, the singular continuation of that people in the same circumstances has exceedingly corroborated that presumption, in succeeding ages, down to the present day: their continued existence, as a distinct people, thus dispersed among all nations, and mixed among the inhabitants of all countries, without being incorporated with any, exhibiting a moral phenomenon, to which nothing parallel or similar is found in the history of mankind.

Having exhibited, I believe, a tolerable just representation of the state of the human mind, in regard to its religious ideas previous to the

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promulgation of Christianity, and taken a slight view of the first propagation of a system so pregnant with great effects, I shall conclude, with assuring you, that,

I remain,

Dear Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XII.

SIR,

I RESUME the pen, at this period, in order to continue my observations and reflections on the history of the human mind, and likewise take the liberty of offering them to your perusal.

Being now arrived at that period when the Christian revelation had been promulgated, and in some measure propagated in the world, but as yet remaining in silent obscurity, let us direct our attention to the state of the Roman empire, which forms the most conspicuous object of the times we are now exploring.

The whole series of political and military transactions, which took place under the imperial government, has been so minutely related by historians, that no person who is acquainted with the Belles Lettres can want any information on that subject. In delineating a general picture, it may, however, be remarked, that the empire flourished in the plenitude of power, and in a state of grandeur and magnificence, unpa-

collected in the annals of nations, from the establishment of the imperial government by Augustus Caesar, until after the death of Constantine; or, we may even extend this period of political greatness to the death of Theodosius, and the last fatal division of the empire between his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius, in which latter period are included about four hundred and thirty years. In this long interval of time the prosperity of the empire suffered several transient interruptions from the revolts of commanders of armies, intestine commotion, the vices and incapacity of emperors, and the inroads of foreign enemies; but the Roman power, impregnable to every mode of attack, surmounted every difficulty, and always rose superior to every disaster. During the space of almost two hundred years, from the accession of Augustus to the death of Antoninus Pius, the Roman power continued stationary in its full meridian blaze, and the empire enjoyed a state of political prosperity and felicity which has seldom fallen to the lot of any nation. Comprising within her vast dominions all the nations skilled in arts and arms, famed for the valour and discipline of her invincible legions, and possessing those immense resources, Rome, by the terror of her name, held the barbarous nations in awe; and it was seldom that any of them durst provoke the display of her victorious arms. Whenever they hazarded such a step, the contest was soon terminated; the victories

of Rome were brilliant, her triumphs were glorious, and the discomfiture of her enemies decisive and fatal. As none of the neighbouring nations presented any object that could be a temptation to avarice, the Romans could now have no inducement to war, but either the acquisition of glory, or the repelling of the predatory inroads of barbarians on the frontiers. The political system of the emperors was, in general, more pacific than that of the republic had ever been; and excepting the war of Vespasian and Titus against the Jews, and that of Trajan against the Parthians, we meet with few important scenes of carnage and devastation during the above-mentioned period. Three unhappy circumstances alone may be considered, however, as an abatement of the felicity the Roman world would otherwise have then enjoyed; namely, the personal vices of some of the emperors, as Nero, Vitellius, and Domitian; the existence of slavery, and the frequent persecutions of the Christians. Much has been said by many writers against the pernicious effects of extensive empire, but many arguments may also be adduced in its favor. The union of a numerous mass of people in one political system is one of the surest preventives of war, as the division of countries into a greater number of independent states is a never-failing source of predatory hostilities, of blood-shed, rapine, and anarchy. Wherever a country is thus divided, such a multiplicity of jarring interests arise, and

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so many objects of ambition present themselves, as cannot fail of producing continual scenes of contention, originating in the ambition, the avarice, and the jarring interests of the rulers or the subjects, which involve the people in all sorts of calamities. Instances without number, might be adduced, but a glance at the state of England, during the time of the heptarchy, will suffice to exemplify the propriety of this observation. In an extensive monarchy there is only one great political interest, and the objects of ambition, however splendid and attractive, are fewer, and consequently within the reach of a smaller number of persons; in such a state all tends to one central point, instead of deviating to different centres. The vast collective mass of the people is united in one political system, and in one general interest; and the different provinces which compose the empire enjoy the advantages of a free and uninterrupted commerce; a circumstance of incalculable benefit, both to individuals and to the whole community. Supposing even an extensive monarchy to be despotic, and the monarch himself a sanguinary and unfeeling tyrant, yet, by reason of the extent of his dominions, only a few individuals, who most of them voluntarily bring themselves into contact with him, feel the effects of his cruelty and despotism. Those who, from motives of ambition or interest, approach his person, and serve him as the instruments of his tyranny, are the persons who principally feel the heavy hand of the ty-

rant. The great mass of the people feel less pressure in a much lighter degree. Distance of situation, and the great multitude of subjects, cause individuals to escape his notice. The reverse is the case in petty states, where the eye of the tyrant is always upon the individuals of his contracted dominions; and a tyrant, at the distance of a thousand miles, is infinitely preferable to a tyrant at home, at our very doors. The history of mankind affords a multiplicity of proofs, that extensive monarchies are more conducive to the tranquillity of the world, and the general interests of humanity, than petty states; and the Roman history furnishes many convincing arguments that a monarchical is preferable to a republican government. Some of the emperors were monsters of vice and cruelty; yet, if we consider and compare the condition of Rome, and her extensive empire under the republican and imperial governments; if we consider the restless and harassed state of her citizens in the time of the republic, their compulsive military conscriptions, their tumults, their intestine commotions and unceasing hostilities, with the surrounding nations, and then contemplate her pacific splendor under the imperial government: if we consider every circumstance, and make a just estimate of things, we shall not, perhaps, hesitate to pronounce the Romans more happy, under the very worst of their emperors, than under the republican system. It is at least an unquestionable truth, that

they sometimes enjoyed more public tranquillity in the space of one reign, as, for instance, in those of Augustus, of Tiberius, of Adrian, and of Antoninus Pius, than they had experienced during the whole period of the existence of the republic. Several, even of those emperors who are stigmatized with the names of tyrants, were beloved not only by the soldiery but by the people: if they were tyrants, the senate, that proud aristocratic body, which had so long oppressed the people, was the principal object of their tyranny.

The most flourishing and pacific period of the imperial government ended with the reign of Antoninus. In the time of Marcus Aurelius, his successor, the Quadi, Altemanni, &c. who inhabited some parts of Austria, Bavaria, and other districts of Germany, on the north side of the Danube, made dreadful irruptions into the empire; as did afterwards the Dacians, who inhabited Moldavia, Transylvania, and most of that part of Hungary which lies on the north side of the Danube. After these the Goths proved terrible enemies to the Roman empire. This nation, so celebrated in the history of imperial Rome, and which acted so conspicuous a part in the subversion of the empire, was originally fixed in Scandinavia, the modern Sweden and Norway, and emigrated from thence as early as the Christian æra. In the time of Antoninus they were seated in Prussia and Pomerania, about the mouth of the Vistula; and at

the same time the Vandals were seated in the northern parts of Germany, along the coasts of the Baltic, extending as far westward as the Elbe. The Goths again emigrated more to the south-east, and took possession of the Ukraine; and moving still farther southward, subdued the Dacians, and fixed their residence in Dacia, where they proved such formidable enemies to Rome. The dominions of the Goths were bounded on the east by the Euxine sea, on the south by the Danube, and they were divided into two kingdoms, that of the eastern, or Ostrogoths, and that of the western or Visigoths. Their territories comprised part of Hungary to the west, but how far they extended northwards cannot be determined, as the Gothic empire sometimes comprehended a great part of Poland and Germany, and at other periods was contracted within much narrower bounds. It is, indeed, impossible to assign the limits of those barbarous nations, whose whole history, if it could be had, would display nothing but successive scenes of emigration, conquest, blood-shed, and plunder. The Goths having seated themselves in Dacia, in the reign of Philip the Arabian, crossed the Danube in that of his successor the Emperor Decius, and made their first inroad into the Roman empire. The Emperor Decius, having come to an engagement with them, was defeated and slain, and his body was never found, and his successor, Gallus, concluded an ignominious peace. The restless and enterprising Goths, not

withstanding, in the reign of Gallienus, crossing the Euxine in three grand divisions, plundered the city of Nicomedia, and all Asia Minor. They also sailed down the Hellespont, took Athens, and plundered all Greece; and their reiterated irruptions, at that period, seemed to threaten nothing less than the entire conquest or desolation of the first provinces of the empire.

A particular detail of transactions and events with which every one who has perused the history of the Roman empire is acquainted, would here be unnecessary. Such a summary as is necessary to preserve the concatenation of events, and concentrate the substance of historical information, is all that is requisite in a general view. It suffices therefore to observe that those barbarous nations, although generally defeated, and often with prodigious slaughter, whenever the Roman armies could bring them to an engagement, notwithstanding their bloody defeats incessantly renewed their depredations, and in the reign of Gallienus, their irruptions were so numerous, and their attacks so general on almost every part of the Roman frontiers, that the dissolution of the empire seemed to be at hand. In addition to the calamities occasioned by foreign wars, many of the commanders of armies, and governors of provinces, erected the standard of revolt, and the Roman empire became an entire scene of anarchy, and exhibited as finished a picture of political infelicity, as it had formerly done of prosperity and splen-

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dor. The reign of Gallienus was not only exceedingly disastrous but likewise peculiarly disgraceful to the Roman name; for the emperor Valerian, father of Gallienus, was at this calamitous period a prisoner in the hands of Sapor, king of Persia, who is said by historians to have treated him with great indignity, obliging the unfortunate emperor to stoop down, and present his bended body as a footstool, when the insulting victor mounted his horse. Sapor is also said to have at last commanded him to be flayed after his death, some say while he was alive, and his skin to be hung in the hall of audience, and kept as a monument to shew that the Romans were not invincible. If these circumstances be true, which however are questioned by some, they are exceedingly disgraceful to the Roman name, and especially to Gallienus, the worthless and unfeeling son of a brave, but unfortunate father. It is, however, certain that Valerian was never liberated : and his deplorable fate is one of the many thousand of instances which history affords, of the vicissitudes of fortune and the precarious and transitory nature of human greatness. In this disastrous reign, the civil and foreign wars which raged throughout the whole Roman world, produced a famine, which was succeeded by so dreadful a pestilence, that during a considerable time above five thousand persons are said to have died daily in the city of Rome; and, according to the calculations of some authors, although there be

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some reason to suspect them of exaggeration, nearly half of the inhabitants of the empire perished by the united calamities of war, famine, and pestilence.

The reign of Gallienus stands, unfortunately, distinguished as the most calamitous period which Rome ever saw, from the æra of the second Punic war to the reign of Honorius. Claudius, a soldier of mean extraction, and originally a peasant of Illyricum, a province situated on the south side of the Danube, and to the east of the northern extremity of the Adriatic Sea, being elected emperor, did as much as could be done in a short reign of three years, to retrieve the glory of the empire; and the succeeding vigorous and military reigns, of Probus and Aurelianus, both of them like Claudius, originally Illyrian peasants, restored Rome to her former power and grandeur. The victories of Probus equalled those of the greatest heroes of antiquity; and the reign of Aurelianus was a continued scene of military operations, and of the most brilliant successes. In his time, the Altemanni crossing the Danube, penetrated as far as Milan; and finding their retreat intercepted by the Emperor at the head of a powerful army, they made so dreadful an irruption into Italy, that the imperial city itself was 'thrown into the utmost consternation.' At that alarming crisis, the inhabitants of Rome inclosed the city, and part of the suburbs, with that celebrated wall called the wall of Aurelian. That

warlike Emperor having, however, repulsed and almost totally exterminated the invading army, was assassinated on his march against the Persians. Although the glory of the empire was thus retrieved, and its territories restored to their former extent by those illustrious peasants from the banks of the Danube, yet we cannot but suppose that it must have considerably suffered from such scenes of war and anarchy. The nations on the northern side of the Danube, from its source to its entrance into the Euxine sea, having become more acquainted with the wealth of the Roman empire, were continually hovering upon the frontiers, ready to seize every opportunity of bursting, like a torrent, into the provinces. The fate of Rome, however, was suspended, and her enemies held at defiance by the irresistible valour and discipline of her invincible legions, under the conduct of a series of illustrious commanders, as Diocletian, Maximin, Galerius, Constantius, Chlorus, and others, who had been trained under those warlike emperors, Claudius, Aurelianus, and Probus; and who, being most of them persons of an obscure origin, had, by passing through all the gradations of military promotion, risen from poverty and obscurity to the empire of the world. During the space of an hundred years, immediately preceding the reign of Constantine, the Roman empire exhibited a political picture of a remarkable and extraordinary nature, of which the prominent features, were the frequent revolutions

in the imperial command, with the sudden advancement, degradation, and assassination of emperors, the revolt of commanders ; and, upon the whole, the empire frequently a scene of anarchy, and rent with intestine commotions, yet presenting on every side a formidable and terrific front to its foreign enemies. Nevertheless, there is little reason to doubt but the collective mass of the inhabitants enjoyed, even in this confused state, a greater share of happiness than under the republican government. In the times of which we are now speaking, the internal commotions and frequent revolutions in the imperial government, chiefly affected the military men. They were the actors, and they were the principal sufferers in those transactions ; the people took little part in them ; and the inroads of Barbarians were temporary and adventitious calamities : but under the republican government war was interwoven with the constitution, and almost essential to its existence. Every citizen was a soldier, and Rome resembled a camp. Hostilities were continual ; every province exhibited a scene of devastation and rapine, until it obtained tranquillity by its subjugation. The system of the senate was to keep the people in a state of continual warfare ; that of the Emperors was to soften their military disposition, and they rather chose to trust their own safety, and that of the empire, to the support of standing armies, accustomed to their commands, attached to their persons, and re-

eruted from all the different classes of their subjects, than to military conscriptions of proud and refractory citizens.

During the space of fifty-six years, which elapsed between the death of Gallienus and the accession of Constantine to the undivided empire of the world, a series of warlike Emperors had every where repulsed the Barbarians, and retrieved the glory of the Roman name. The empire had resumed its former splendor, and displayed the same exterior show of power and grandeur as in the first ages after the reign of Augustus ; but during the last thirty-seven years of this period, the imperial command was in a divided state. Diocletian making Maximin his associate in the imperial dignity, those Emperors made a division of the empire, the former governing the east, and the latter the west. This system was continued, and the divisions and subdivisions were multiplied, so that at one period the empire was governed by six Emperors, Constantine, Maxentius, and Maximian in the west, and Licinius, Maximin, and Galerius in the east. In this singular system each of the Emperors exercised the sovereign authority in his own part of the empire, but their joint authority extended over the whole ; and all public edicts were issued in the name of all the Emperors. This division of the empire continued until the joint Emperors, regarding one another as rivals, at last became open enemies, and involved the empire in civil wars, which

ended in the elevation of Constantine to the united sovereignty of the whole, A. D. 306.

That Emperor having, by his signal military achievements, in a series of successful wars, and the successive defeats of Maxentius, and Licinius, rendered himself sole master of the Roman world, turned his victorious arms against the hereditary enemies of Rome. Crossing the Danube, he penetrated into the inmost recesses of Dacia, and reduced the Goths, and other barbarous nations of those quarters, to such extremities, that during the greatest part of his reign, no enemy durst make an attack upon the empire, which then enjoyed a profound tranquillity, and displayed a degree of power and splendor unequalled since the reign of Antoninus. After this summary of events, from the reign of Augustus to that of Constantine, the general political and social state of the Romans, during that period, in the next place claims our attention.

The political system of Rome, under the imperial government, was singular and unprecedented: and the empire might justly be defined a despotic monarchy under the form of a republic. The senatorial and consular dignities still existed, and all the republican forms remained. The offices of *Ædile*, *Prætor*, &c. remained as during the existence of the republic; but under the imperial government those offices were only nominal; and Augustus had the address to unite most of them in his own person,

a piece of policy which proves that consummate statesman not to have been ignorant, how much mankind are influenced by names. The greatest and wisest of his successors followed his example, and also the Emperors, who knew and consulted their own interest, affected to respect those republican forms: and during the first age of the imperial government, if the election of the Emperor was not made in the first place by the senate, the authority and approbation of that body was deemed necessary to sanction the election, and render it valid. In process of time, however, the military thought themselves alone entitled to the right of electing their Emperors, and became the sole arbiters of their destiny. The Emperors were elected or deposed by the sole authority of the army: and the senate, in order to maintain at least the appearance of an authority, which it no longer possessed, hastened to ratify those military elections. The Prætorian guards first arrogated this right to themselves, and their example was soon followed by the Legionaries. This military mode of election was once carried to such a height of extravagant and shameless effrontery, that the Prætorian guards having deposed and murdered the Emperor Alius, Pertinax disposed of the imperial dignity by public sale, exhibiting an instance of military usurpation and licentiousness unparalleled in the history of the world; the sovereignty of the greatest and most powerful empire that ever existed, sold by public

anction to the best bidder! The price for which they sold it to Didius Julianus, was, according to Mr. Gibbon, 6250 drachmas, amounting to about 200*l.* sterling per man. The imperial constitution of Rome was entirely a system of military despotism. The imperial title and dignity were of a military nature, and after the reign of Commodus, the soldiery had the entire disposal of them, and were, in fact, the only sovereigns of the empire, neither the senate nor the people having any share in the government, or in the election of their Emperors, only the name of the senate seemed to give a legal sanction and constitutional validity to the military elections. It seems, that after popular assemblies were abolished, on the accession of Tiberius, the ostensible constitution of the imperial government was, that the Emperor should be elected by the senate as generalissimo of the whole armed force of the empire; or, as the Romans still called it, of the republic; that the senate should be the sole legislative body, but that the executive power should be committed to the Emperor. But the actual constitution was, that the Emperors were elected and supported by the military, who were the real sovereigns, and the emperor their agent, exhibiting a specimen of the very worst kind of elective monarchies; no Emperor, how great soever might be his virtues or his abilities, being able to maintain his standing, unless he took care to conciliate the favour of the army. The Emperors

possessing the executive power, with the whole military force of the empire at their disposal, set aside the legislative authority of the senate. Until the reign of Adrian, the Emperors promulgated their laws in the character of Roman magistrates, authorised by the senate: but Adrian constituted himself the fountain of the law; and after his reign, not only the public administration, but also the private jurisprudence of the empire, was modelled by the will of the Emperor.

We have already observed, that the Romans had, in the latter times of the republic, departed from those maxims which excluded persons of an inferior class from admission into the army. We have remarked, that C. Marius was the first who enlisted persons of such a description, and that his example was followed by other ambitious leaders. Indeed it could hardly be supposed, that either a Sylla, a Cæsar, or a Pompey, would exclude from their armies any that were willing, and appeared able to render them effective service; and, consequently, before the extinction of the republican system, a considerable change had, in that respect, taken place.

After the establishment of the imperial government, the Emperors, as before observed, preferring regular standing armies, levied in the provinces, to military conscriptions of citizens, adopted the mode of recruiting from the lowest classes of the people, and admitting persons of every description to the honour of being

qualified to enlist in the Roman legions; and also conferred on such as enrolled themselves, the privileges of Roman citizens, which, by reason of exemption from the tributary taxes paid by the provincials, and the public donations of money, &c. already mentioned, were very great, and had been rather augmented than diminished under the Emperors. The annual stipend of the legionaries, as fixed by Domitian, who had somewhat augmented their pay, was twelve pieces of gold, a sum nearly equivalent to ten pounds sterling; and each legionary soldier, after twenty years service, received about an hundred pounds sterling, or its equivalent in land.

The famous corps, called the Prætorian guards, was established by Augustus for his body guards, and for the defence of the capital. Their pay and perquisites were double of those of the legionaries. At first they consisted of about ten thousand men. Of these, three cohorts were quartered in Rome, and the rest in the environs. They were all assembled at Rome, by Tiberius, and fixed in a permanent camp under the walls. Vitellius augmented their number to fifteen thousand. These Prætorian guards were recruited from the flower of the Italian youth, until the reign of Septimius Severus; who cashiered them as a punishment for the murder of the Emperor Pertinax, and their presumptuous sale of the empire by public auction. Severus then formed a new body of Prætorian guards,

amounting to the number of fifty thousand, and composed of the best soldiers, selected out of every legion. That Emperor increased the pay and perquisites of the soldiery beyond all former example, and taught them to expect, and finally to claim, extraordinary donatives on every occasion of public festivity or danger. Diocletian and Maximianus dismissed the Prætorian corps from their former station of body guards, and called to that duty two regiments of Illyrians, whom they named Jovians and Herculeans, as they themselves assumed the names of Jovius and Hercules; willing, it seems, to make their subjects believe that they ranked among the gods, or at least were of celestial descent. Constantine, after his victory over Maxentius, conceiving it to be impolitic to suffer the existence of so dangerous a corps, finally abolished the Prætorian guards; and having, in consequence of their resistance, forced their fortified camp under the walls of Rome, dispersed them among the troops of the provinces. Thus was broken and dispersed that celebrated military corps, which had so often disposed of the empire of the world.

When we concluded our observations at the period marked by the reign of Augustus, we contemplated Rome in the zenith of her glory, mistress of the world, the center of power, wealth, and learning, as well as of luxury and dissipation; her wealth and power had scarcely any further opportunity of augmentation; but her luxury,

although like her greatness, it seemed to have arrived at its ultimate pitch, was considerably encreased under the imperial government. Her citizens no longer thought of conquest and plunder, but of tranquillity and enjoyment. Her wars, as already observed, were beyond comparison less frequent than under the republican system, and were oftener undertaken for defence than for aggrandizement of power, or extension of dominion. This change, from a system of perpetual warfare, to a love of peace, proceeded partly from the pacific dispositions of several of the Emperors, and the depression of the senate, which no longer possessed the power of dragging the people out to arms under the specious pretext of asserting the glory of the republic and the majesty of the Roman people; and, perhaps, most of all, from the circumstance of the empire having nothing to gain, but much to lose by hostilities, the state of the surrounding nations being such that the conquest of them could afford no prospect of gratification to the ambition, the avarice, and luxury of the Romans.

The splendid exhibitions of the Circus were more pompous, and the public games were celebrated with greater magnificence, under the imperial than they had been under the republican government; and the triumphs of several of the Emperors, especially of Vespasian, and his son Titus, also those of Trajan, Probus, and Aurelian, exhibited scenes of unparalleled mag-

nificence. It seems to have been the policy of the Emperors, as it had formerly been of the senate, to keep the restless populace in humour by amusing them with pompous spectacles, and indulging them with liberal donations; and by embellishing the city, which almost every Emperor, whose reign was of any considerable duration, ornamented with some superb edifice, as a permanent mark of his grandeur, and of his affection for the Roman people. The city was consequently exceedingly embellished under the imperial government. The most magnificent edifices, and other stupendous works, which have attracted the admiration of posterity, and of which the venerable ruins to this day attest the instability of human power and grandeur, were the works of the Emperors; such were the amphitheatres of Nero and Titus—the triumphal arches—the column of Trajan—the mausoleum of Adrian, now the castle of St. Angelo—the baths of Diocletian, and many others, which it would be tedious to enumerate. During this period the city was undoubtedly enlarged as well as embellished. And as the case is in all wealthy and luxurious capitals, it may be supposed that great numbers of artizans and traders of every description would flock to a place which was the centre of wealth and the seat of dissipation. This supposition is probable; but, however, some suppose that Rome was never more populous, nor much more extensive, than in the reign of Augustus, a supposition which does not

seem compatible with the existing circumstances of those times. This is a point, however, which it is now impossible to determine, as historians have left us in the dark concerning those important particulars, while they have told us all they knew, and more than they knew, of battles, sieges, rebellions, and usurpations; and filled their pages with narratives of slaughter and desolation which disgrace human nature. These things they pretend to display with as much minute accuracy as if they had been spectators of each bloody scene, and privy to every disgraceful crime they expose to view; while, in regard to the literary, scientific, and commercial improvements of nations, they leave us to guess what we can from broken hints which have casually dropped from their pens, by reason of their being in connection with circumstances of inferior magnitude, which it has pleased them to relate. An acquaintance with history is, however, absolutely necessary to every one who pretends to any degree of general information and knowledge of mankind. It must be studied, such as it is, and we must make the best of it we can.

An author who was contemporary with the Emperors Constantine, Constantius, and Julian, has left us a striking picture of Roman luxury in that age. The grandees of Rome, he says, shewed their rank and consequence by the loftiness of their chariots, which were many of them of massy silver, curiously carved, and the trap-

pings of their horses and mules richly embossed and ornamented with gold, and made an ostentatious display of their opulence in the ponderous magnificence of their dress. Their long robes of purple silk floating in the wind, as they were moved by art or accident, occasionally discovered their rich tunics, gorgeously embroidered with the figures of divers animals. The example of the nobles was followed by the matrons and ladies, with the wealthy plebeians, whose superb carriages were continually driving round the immense extent of the city and suburbs. In fine, luxury was, in the latter ages of the empire, carried to an extreme in Rome.

The tragic and comic muses had remained almost silent since the extinction of the republic. Under the imperial government their places were occupied by licentious farce, effeminate music, and splendid pageantry; and the pantomime was much in fashion among the Romans of the latter ages. The spacious and magnificent theatres of Rome were filled by three thousand female dancers, and three thousand singers, with the masters of the different chorusses. But the principal and most splendid amusement of the Roman people consisted in the frequent exhibitions of the public games and spectacles in the Circus. To these may be added, the public baths, to which persons of all ranks had access at a very moderate expence; the price of admission not much exceeding one eighth of an English penny. No other city ever afforded such a multipli-

city of magnificent exhibitions and splendid amusements, at so cheap a rate, as Rome furnished to her numerous inhabitants; and in no other metropolis, of the ancient or modern world, have luxury, dissipation, and ostentatious parade, been carried to such an height of extravagance.

While we contemplate the unparalleled magnificence and splendor of Rome, and the unexampled luxury and dissipation of her inhabitants, under the imperial government, we cannot, however, but lament the decline of learning during the same period. Popular assemblies were discountenanced by Augustus, and totally abolished at the accession of Tiberius. Eloquence, therefore, the grand object of Roman, as it had formerly been of Grecian study, lost its utility and importance, and even in the senate was of little advantage to its possessor or to the public. Whatever forms might still exist, the constitution was totally changed. Nothing could be effected by influencing the minds of the senators, or moving the passions of the people, by the charms of eloquence. All was at the disposal of a military commander, dignified with the title of Imperator, or General, which we translate Emperor; a title, which, among the Romans, literally signified *Generallissimo*, or Commander in Chief of the whole armed force of the republic, as the Roman empire was still improperly called. Eloquence having therefore lost its influence, the cultivation of letters was

no longer pursued with the same avidity as formerly. It was, indeed, perhaps impossible to carry philological learning beyond the point to which it had been carried in the latter times of the republic, as the most elegant writers among the moderns have not been able to surpass the compositions of Cicero, and the writers of the Augustan age. Roman literature, however, did not long remain stationary, but soon began to decline. During that prosperous and luminous period, which elapsed between the establishment of the imperial government and the reign of M. Aurelius, the decline of learning, and the arts, was less perceptible; for although senatorial and forensic eloquence had lost power and utility, a taste for letters was nevertheless kept up by the munificence and examples of the Emperors, who were most of them men of letters, and some of them, particularly Augustus, Adrian, Antoninus, and M. Aurelius, were great patrons and promoters of learning. After this period, science and literature rapidly fell into a declining state. Many of the succeeding Emperors were illiterate peasants, who, by a train of favorable circumstances had, from the lowest class of people, been raised to the imperial purple, and held literary pursuits and acquirements in low estimation. No farther progress in science had been made beyond the attainments of the Augustan age. The philosophy of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, chiefly consisted in moral observations, rules, and pre-

cepts; or in subtle questions and abstruse speculations, in which the human mind, after it had arrived at a certain point, could proceed no farther on any fixed principles, and lost itself in wild conjecture. They were not acquainted with that kind of philosophy founded on experiment, by which the moderns have ascertained so many doubtful points, and made such numerous and important discoveries. Before the reign of Constantine every kind of science and learning had sunk far below its former pitch. That Emperor, however, gave great encouragement to men of genius, and although destitute of a literary education himself, made every possible effort for the revival of a taste for learning and the fine arts, especially the latter, of which he found a want for the embellishment of Constantinople; but the decline was too great to be retrieved in the space of one reign, and the succeeding ages proved unfavorable to their culture. The reign of Constantine, however, produced, or found already formed, some men of extraordinary talents and erudition among the Christians, particularly the eloquent Lactantius, and the famous Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, a man of uncommon erudition, as may be discovered in his writings; for in one of his works, the *Prep. Evangelica*, he quotes no fewer than four hundred Greek Authors. In this age, the study of divinity began to be the prevailing taste in the literary world.

The amelioration of the condition of slavery is

not the least pleasing subject of contemplation afforded by imperial Rome. It has already been observed, that the general change in the political and social circumstances of the Romans, had proved extremely favorable to their slaves; and that, from the concurrence of various causes, the condition of slavery was exceedingly meliorated before the extinction of the republican government. The same combination of causes, existing in a still greater extent, operated also with greater efficacy in favor of that oppressed class of mortals under the imperial system; as luxury, which had proved so favorable to the Roman slaves, still encreased; and the pacific system of the Emperors, from the establishment of the imperial government, until the incursions of the Barbarians roused them to arms, with the tranquillity the empire had in general enjoyed from the acceesion of Augustus to that of M. Aurelius, had caused the influx of slaves to be inconsiderable; a circumstance which necessarily rendered them more valuable, and caused them to be more highly prized. The republican ideas of the Romans, and the tributary distributions to the poorer class of the citizens, precluded among the higher ranks the inclination, and among the lower class the necessity of undertaking those employments, which, among the moderns, are so far from being disgraceful, that they are esteemed honorable; and those offices of honor and emolument, which in modern courts are conferred on the higher rank of subjects,

were, in the imperial court of Rome, generally filled with slaves. Indeed the Emperors themselves had many good reasons to prefer slaves before Roman citizens in the offices of their household. Some of the Emperors also promulgated laws in favour of that unhappy class of people. The Emperor Adrian, in particular, deprived masters of their arbitrary power over their slaves, which they had possessed from the building of Rome to that time, and put the persons of the slaves under the protection of the law, which is an instance, among many thousands of others, that may be adduced to prove that monarchical government is generally more favorable to the lower orders of the people than republicanism; for in all the boasted ages of (what is called) Roman liberty, no regulations had been made in favor of that unfortunate race of mortals, who, during the whole period of the republican government, had been without legal protection. We have already observed, that in the opulent and luxuriant times of the republic, the enfranchisement of slaves, either from liberality of sentiment, ostentation or interested motives, had become fashionable. The senate enacted laws for the exclusion of enfranchised slaves and their descendants from the public offices of the state. These laws, however, in time, became obsolete, and were disregarded under the imperial government; when enlistment into the army conferred the rights of citizenship on persons of every description. The

distance between slavery and freedom gradually lessened, and Diocletian, the son of an enfranchised slave, and even supposed to have been born while his father was in the state of slavery, having enrolled himself in one of the Roman legions, and passed through the various gradations of military promotion, seized the imperial purple, was proclaimed Emperor by the army, recognized by the senate, and reigned with distinguished reputation over the Roman world.

The circumstance which has contributed above all others, to exhibit the imperial government of Rome to the eyes of posterity, as the most iniquitous system of tyranny, and to stigmatize many of the Emperors, with the epithets of the most sanguinary tyrants that ever disgraced a sceptre, was the frequent and cruel persecutions of the Christians; but if we examine with accuracy, and make a just statement of the case, perhaps many of the Emperors will, in some measure, stand exculpated in the eye of impartial decision, for it is to be remarked, that notwithstanding the cruel and unjust persecutions of the Christians, under the imperial government, few of the Emperors were persecutors from inclination. Many of those who issued the most sanguinary edicts against the Christians, are known to have shewn no particular aversion against Christianity, or its professors; but even to have frequently promoted them to offices of honour and emolument, until they were misled by evil counsellors, who either had an aversion

against the Christian doctrine, or a personal pique against some individuals of that religion. This was the case with Valerian, who, in the commencement of his reign, was particularly favorable to the Christians, and advanced many of them to the most honorable and lucrative employments, until on the inroads of Saporess, king of Persia, into the Roman provinces, he suffered himself to be persuaded by designing priests, and intriguing courtiers, that all the calamities which the empire suffered, and with which it was threatened, proceeded from the vengeance of the gods for suffering a sect of people to exist who were the professed enemies of their worship. This was commonly the lure by which the pagan priests drew the Emperors into the snare, and working upon their superstitious prejudices, instigated them to sanction, by their authority, those persecutions which they themselves had projected.

If the persecutions raised against the Christians were traced to their original source, they might, undoubtedly, be ascribed to three principal causes; the private piques and jealousies of persons in power; or such as wished to be so: the artful suggestions of the pagan priests, and others interested in the support of paganism; and, lastly, the superstition of the people. It requires no very extensive reading, nor a very wide sphere of observation, to trace the operation, and calculate the effects of these causes. Every one who is in a moderate degree ac-

acquainted with the history of courts and courtiers, knows the jealousies of favorites, and of candidates for favor, and the means they frequently make use of to alienate the mind of the great personage on whom their hopes depend, from all such as they know to be their rivals, or suspect of any design of becoming such. When persons of this description saw Christians advanced to offices, which they themselves desired to fill, and could find no ground of accusation, either of treason or misconduct, against them, they would naturally have recourse to their last expedient, and accuse them of impiety, as enemies and contemners of the gods of the empire. Such was the conduct of the Babylonian courtiers in regard to Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, and of the Persians towards Daniel. The first, when they perceived the three men above mentioned to be in favor with Nebuchadnezzar, endeavoured to effect their destruction by accusing them to that prince of not worshipping the gods that he worshipped, and of refusing to adore the image which he had erected; and the latter, from similar motives, impeached Daniel of disobedience to the king's command. Every one, who, by reading or observation, is acquainted with court intrigues, will easily perceive that the Babylonians did not accuse the three favorites from any motives of religion. Some of them, perhaps, had as little veneration for the image in the plain of Dura, as those Jews themselves had. The true reason was, the favor

and influence they had with the monarch, and the honor to which they saw them advanced. In like manner the grandees of Persia did not impeach Daniel of contempt for the king's command from any extraordinary respect they themselves had for it, but to procure his destruction, which they found themselves unable to effect by any other means; and if we reason from the analogies of moral experience, we may safely presume, that, under the Roman Emperors, persecutions were sometimes excited or promoted by persons wholly indifferent to religious matters, but not indifferent to the honors and emoluments to which they saw their rivals in power and favor advanced. When those rivals happened to be Christians, as was often the case, under many of the Pagan Emperors, those jealous candidates for favor and promotion, when they could not otherwise ruin the individual, attacked the profession in imitation of the Babylonian and Persian courtiers of a more early period.

It is easy to conceive how much the priests of a pompous and ceremonious religion were interested in the support of a system which procured them honor, emolument, and influence. The priests of paganism could not but see the gradual encroachments which Christianity was making upon that system on which their credit and fortune depended. They could not fail of perceiving the decrease in the number of their votaries and offerings, the diminution of their cre-

dit, and, in fine, all the evils which menaced their declining religion. The philosophers also foresaw, in the overthrow of their systems, the destruction of their credit, and the extinction of their fame. Their interests coincided with those of the priests, and the views of both were seconded by all that numerous tribe of artizans, and others concerned in the embellishments of their temples, of which we have a striking instance in the conduct of Demetrius, the silversmith of Ephesus. Paganism was a splendid, pompous, and ceremonious religion; calculated not only to strike the eyes and impose on the minds of the vulgar, but also to attach a very considerable number of men of talent and ingenuity to its interests and support. The number and magnificence of its temples, the superb statues of its gods, and the curious and costly utensils used in its sacrifices and ceremonies, gave employment to numbers of ingenious artisans, and its frequent and splendid festivals afforded an agreeable entertainment to the populace. It is, therefore, no wonder that a numerous body of people, throughout the whole empire, should be ready to support a system from whence they derived so many advantages, and desirous of depressing a religion which threatened its overthrow. Of all this interested assemblage, the priests formed the van, and seized every opportunity of kindling the flames of persecution, when any disaster, as pestilence, famine, or unsuccessful war, afflicted or menaced the empire.

On these occasions they never failed to ascribe the public calamities to the progress of Christianity, and to persuade the Emperors that the wrath of the gods could be appeased only by the blood of the Christians. The representations of the priests, seconded by a numerous body of persons, of different descriptions, interested in the support of Paganism, could not fail of operating on the minds of the Emperors, several of whom had, by military merit, intrigue, or usurpation, been raised from indigence and obscurity to the imperial purple, and knew their own standing to be exceedingly precarious. The superstition of the people may also justly be supposed to have contributed to excite a spirit of intolerance and persecution against a sect of men, who were represented to them by their priests as the persons who, by their contempt of the gods, drew down the wrath of heaven upon the whole empire. It requires only a very little knowledge of the effects of superstition, upon vulgar minds, to conceive that such notions, inculcated by their priests, would excite the public voice against the Christians, as long as paganism continued the established and predominant religion of the empire. It appears, on perusing the histories of the different persecutions, that many of the governors of cities and provinces were compelled by popular fury to carry the laws enacted against the Christians into execution more rigorously than they would otherwise have done.

Thus it appears, that different causes concurred to produce those persecutions which filled the calendar with martyrs, and peopled heaven with saints. The Supreme and all-wise Being had, in the mysterious dispensations of his providence, ordained that the cruelty of wicked and unconscientious men should bring into light the courage and fortitude of his faithful worshippers, and shew that all the power and policy of mankind, combined against Christianity, should only tend to demonstrate the feebleness of all human efforts acting in opposition to the Divine will. The blood of the martyrs was like seed sown in a fertile soil; and the number of Christians rapidly encreased, notwithstanding the havock made among them by persecutors. In the latter part of the third century the church had enjoyed a long repose from persecution, and during this period of tranquillity had begun to grow opulent and conspicuous. The clergy had already begun to learn the art of exchanging their spiritual merchandize for the temporal riches of those who were under their direction, and some of the prelates lived in splendor and opulence, as appears from the case of Paul, of Samosata. The Christians had lived in tranquillity, and enjoyed all the privileges of the other Roman subjects, during the space of forty years, and were exceedingly favored by the Emperor Diocletian, when a storm burst over their heads which seemed to threaten the entire extinction of Christianity. Its professors had grown so nu-

merous, and were so much favored by that Emperor, that the whole mass of the interested adherents and supporters of Paganism were alarmed, at the increasing prevalence of a religion, which threatened its overthrow, and loudly called upon the Emperor to avert, by the extermination of the Christians, the vengeance of the gods ready to be poured upon the empire for tolerating the professed despisers of their worship. The Emperor, although he had passed his life in camps, and was little versed in the principles and tendency of religious systems, was at first decidedly averse to intolerant measures. It is asserted by several historians, that the infernal project was, during six months, in agitation, before he could be prevailed upon to give it the sanction of the imperial authority. The importunities of the priests, and the solicitations of their abettors, grew daily more pressing; but the Emperor resisted them a long time with inflexible firmness, and could not, without horror, look forward to the consequences of letting loose the blood-hounds of persecution against so great a number of his unoffending subjects. Maximian, whom he had made his colleague in the imperial dignity, had already consented to the solicitations of the enemies of Christianity, and Diocletian thus reluctantly signed the bloody edict. It was not long before the horrid execution began to take place, and every species of cruelty which the infernal spirit of persecution could invent was exercised upon the professors of that religion. This was the most rigorous

persecution the church had ever experienced ; and it is supposed that a greater number of Christians suffered martyrdom in this than in all the other persecutions. Britain was the only province of the empire that was free from its effects. In this country the Christians found tranquillity and protection under the equitable government of Constantius Chlorus, father of the great Constantine, who, although a Pagan, was decidedly averse to every kind of intolerance in religious matters, it being with him a fixed principle, that considering the variety of opinions concerning the most acceptable mode of worshipping the Supreme Being, all men being the children of one common Father, every one had an indisputable right to render his homage to the Universal Parent in the manner he himself thought the best. This just and liberal turn of mind in that Emperor afforded protection to the Christians in that part of the empire which was under his immediate government, until Constantine, his son, having acquired the entire dominion of the west, with Lucinius, his colleague, in the east, issued at Milan their famous edict of universal liberty of conscience, which immediately put a stop to the horrors of persecution in every part of the Roman world. At this remarkable period of the history of the church, we may pause a while in order to prepare for the contemplation of a new and extraordinary display of Divine Providence in the triumph of Christianity.

I am, Sir, &c,

LETTER XIII.

SIR,

OUR observations are now to be directed to a new and interesting scene, which began to be opened in the world, by the establishment of Christianity in the Roman empire.

When we contemplate the new and extraordinary aspect of human affairs at that momentous crisis, we cannot but consider the age of Constantine, as a distinct and most important period in the history, both of the Roman empire and of the Christian religion. The reign of that Emperor forms the line of demarkation between the Pagan and the Christian world, between the predominance of that system of Polytheism and idol-worship, which had, during so many ages, disgraced the reason and obscured the understanding of man, and the triumph of Christianity, which has ever since, in a more or less luminous manner, shed its benign and irradiating influence on the human intellect. It may be asserted beyond all possibility of contradiction, that the reign of Constantine has, by the establishment of Christianity, acquired a more extensive and lasting influence over the moral condition of mankind, and the general ideas of the human mind, in all succeeding ages, than that of any other monarch who has ever appeared on the political theatre of the world. The Roman empire, which Constantine governed, when in

the acmé of its greatness, is now no more; and the city of Constantinople, which he founded, in order to perpetuate the glory of his reign, is now in the hands of a people who are enemies to the religion he so assiduously exerted himself to establish, and who, in his days, were a nation totally unknown; but, in the establishment of Christianity, he has erected to his own memory a monument, more durable than brass or marble, a fabric which will never fall to ruin, and which experience shews, that no human efforts can overturn.

Without entering into tedious details, it suffices, in a general view of the occurrences of this important reign to observe, that Constantine, receiving intelligence of the sickness of Constantius Chlorus, his father, took this journey, or rather made his escape from Nicomedia, where he then resided with Galerius, and travelling with extraordinary speed, arrived at York just in time to close the eyes of his dying parent, and to receive his last instructions, in which he is said to have exhorted him to rule with justice and clemency, and to have particularly recommended to his protection the injured and oppressed Christians. Constantius being dead, Constantine was immediately proclaimed Emperor by the soldiery at York; where, having received the imperial purple, and performed the funeral rites, and the apotheosis of his deceased father, according to the Pagan custom, he set out for Gaul. It is inconsistent with our

present purpose to attempt a particular detail of the circumstances which concurred to make Constantine sole master of the Roman world. Historians have circumstantially related his signal victory over Maxentius, near the Milvian bridge, without the gates of Rome; the two civil wars between him and Licinius; the great battle of Adrianople, where Constantine is said to have performed prodigies of valour, unexampled in the annals of military exertion and achievement, and in their full extent, as related by historians, the avowed enemies of his fortune and his fame, absolutely incredible; the siege of Byzantium; the forcing of the passage of the Hellespont; and the final defeat of Licinius at the battle of Chrysopolis, now Scutari, on the coast of Asia Minor, opposite to Constantinople. These are events, of which no one is ignorant who has perused the narratives of the historians of that age.

The motives which induced Constantine to embrace and establish Christianity, after he had waded through seas of blood to the sovereignty of the world, are variously delineated by different writers, and merit, in an eminent degree, the attention of the historian and the moral philosopher. It is, indeed, extremely difficult at this distance of time, to develop the motives which induced him to take so decided a step; yet from general existing circumstances, accurately examined, and justly estimated, we may, perhaps, form conjectures amounting to the highest de-

gree of probability, and falling but little short of certainty.

It has ever been the general opinion, that a conviction of the divine truth of the Christian religion was the motive, which impelled Constantine to embrace its doctrines, and to establish Christianity under the sanction of the imperial authority. However, Mr. Gibbon, and some other writers of these latter times, seem willing to excite a suspicion, that inducements of a political nature might have determined him in favour of that extraordinary measure. Without pretending to investigate the secret movements of the mind of a prince who reigned fourteen hundred and seventy years ago, a variety of circumstances authorize us to question the propriety of Mr. Gibbon's supposition. That elegant writer imagines, that Constantine, reflecting on the ungovernable disposition of the Romans, and the precarious tenure of the imperial purple, and observing at the same time the peaceable manners of the Christians, might have supposed, that by establishing Christianity, the bloody revolutions, which had brought so many of the Emperors to an untimely death, might in a great measure be prevented; and that by attaching the Christians to his interest, he might claim the sovereignty of the empire by divine right for himself and his descendants, in imitation of the kings of Judah, who had, by that title, so long preserved the crown in the family of David; while the kings of Israel, who held

the sovereignty by popular favor, had frequently experienced the same fate as the Roman Emperors, whose power, like theirs, was founded on popular, or rather on military election and support. In favor of this supposition, Mr. Gibbon harangues, with his usual floridity of style, and fertility of imagination, as a person in love with his own conjectures; and supposes the Christian orators, among whom Lactantius was the most eloquent, representing to Constantine that he would be the David of the Romans, and by the claim of Divine right, lay in his family the foundation of an empire to be transmitted to his latest posterity. Impartial candor must, however, confess, that the existing circumstances of the Roman empire in that age, were not such as authorize an opinion that Constantine embraced the Christian religion from any political motives or inducements of a temporal nature; for, notwithstanding the eloquent but romantic reasoning of Mr. Gibbon, the disadvantages of such a measure, considered in a political view, overbalanced the advantages. At Constantine's accession, and during the whole time of his reign, Paganism was the religion of a vast majority of the empire, and a far greater part of its military strength lay among the Pagans than among the Christians. According to the computation made by Mr. Gibbon himself, the number of Christians in Constantine's reign, did not exceed one twentieth part of the inhabitants of the empire; a calculation which affords very

little ground to suppose that the Emperor should think of embracing and establishing Christianity in order to render his sovereignty more secure. It is even a circumstance that must excite the wonder of posterity, that no revolt of the Pagans took place in consequence of this remarkable change; and that expiring Paganism, with so vast a superiority of strength on its side, made not one single struggle to avert its impending fate. It is certainly a phenomenon in the history of the Roman empire, which cannot be accounted for by any remarks that history enables us to make on the conduct of mankind on any similar occasions, and which can hardly be ascribed to any other cause under Divine Providence, than the entirely despotic state of the Roman government, the great military reputation of the Emperor, the inviolable attachment of the soldiery to him during his life, and the extraordinary respect which they had for his memory after his death. We cannot omit to remark, that the very supposition that Constantine expected, by establishing the Christian religion, to reign by the title of Divine right; and to perpetuate that claim in his family can hardly imply less than his conviction of the Divine authority of that religion, in consequence of which he might expect from heaven that support, which his establishment of Christianity was not in the least calculated to procure him from his Pagan subjects, in whom the principal strength of his empire consisted.

It is the celebrated vision of Constantine, which he is said to have seen in his march against Maxentius, and which, in connection with his subsequent dream, is generally believed to have been the principal cause of his conversion, was a real fact, and not a religious fiction; that circumstance alone is sufficient to determine the question, and to silence all the arguments of those who would insinuate that he embraced Christianity from temporal motives. It is, perhaps, as curious a piece of history as any recorded in the annals of the world, and merits, in the highest degree, the attention of the critic and the philosopher.

We are informed that Constantine, being in Gaul, was invited by the senate and citizens of Rome to undertake a war against Maxentius, who ruled in a tyrannical manner the capital and the province which constituted his part of the empire. Constantine, on receiving this invitation, which he probably had solicited, immediately began his march towards the capital of the world. His troops consisted of veteran soldiers, but were far inferior in number to those he knew Maxentius would bring against him. He was marching against an enemy, from whom, according to the rules of war among the rival Emperors and generals of Rome, he was, in case of defeat, to expect no mercy. The enterprize in which he was engaged was of the most hazardous nature, and the object of singular magnitude and importance. The point to be determined

was, whether he should be sole Emperor of the west, or be expelled from that part of the empire already under his dominion, and ambition prompted him to make the trial. One of our ecclesiastical historians fixes on this critical period of Constantine's life, to delineate the state of his mind respecting religious matters, his ideas of the nature of the Supreme Being, and his reflections on his providential government and absolute disposal of all things; as also on the mode of worship the most acceptable to Him. The delineation is curious and interesting, and although merely conjectural is not improbable. He says, that Constantine, meditating on his perilous enterprize, the superior force he had to contend with, and the great uncertainty of success, began to make serious reflections on the Divine Providence, and the supernatural interposition of some great and unseen power, which has the disposal of human affairs; observing, at the same time, that most of the Emperors who adhered to the worship of that multifarious plurality of gods which the Pagan world adored, had come to a tragical end; but that his father, Constantius, who it appears had, like the philosophers, been rather a deist than an idolator, always worshipped one-only Supreme Being and Sovereign of the universe, through whose all-powerful support he had been invariably successful in his undertakings. In consequence of these reflections, says the historian, Constantine being in extreme uncertainty

of mind respecting the proper object of adoration, and the most acceptable manner of worshipping him, poured out the anxiety of his soul before the Lord of the universe, calling him to witness the sincerity of his heart, and beseeching him to enlighten his mind in regard to the right manner of invoking his protection and assistance, whether through the medium of a plurality of divinities, according to the established rules of Pagan worship, or as one eternal and undivided Unity, in conformity to the doctrines of the Christian religion. These are ingenious conjectures, but they are only conjectures; the propriety of them may, however, be examined, and the investigation merits the attention of the contemplative observer, who delights to trace the causes and consequences of great events, and to develop the operations of the human mind.

In the precarious situation in which Constantine then stood, on the point of deciding a contest of such importance, on the issue of which his all depended, it is not difficult to conceive that he must have revolved in his mind reflections of a serious nature; and as it was the custom among Pagans, more, I believe, than among modern Christians, to look up for Divine assistance, it is not improbable that the different, and indeed totally opposite opinions of the Christians and Pagans, relative to supernatural things, might excite some doubt in the mind of a thinking man who found himself in a situation so much needing the protection of heaven,

without knowing in what manner to ask it ; for it is extremely probable that Constantine, and many other Pagans of that age, although not convinced of the truth of Christianity, had but little confidence in the gods they worshipped, and began shrewdly to suspect that the whole system of Paganism was nothing more than an imposition on the minds of men. In that critical period, when Paganism was on the decline, and rapidly losing credit, and Christianity not yet established, it is reasonable to suppose that the minds of men must have been much agitated in regard to religious subjects. On a survey of the existing circumstances of that age, we may without hazard conclude this to have been the case, unless we can suppose the nature and composition of the human mind, at that time, to have been essentially different from what we experience it to be in our days, and from what it has been in every age, when matters of extraordinary importance, whether religious or political, have been in an unsettled state. On the one hand they saw a system which, from time immemorial, had attracted the veneration of mankind falling into disrepute, except among its priests and other interested adherents. They discooered that this system could give no satisfactory solution to that grand problem, the most important, the most difficult, and the most itneresting of all others, whether death be a total extinction of being, or only a passage to a future state of existence. On the other hand, they saw a new religion sprung up

in the empire diametrically opposite to the ancient system; a religion which inculcated infinitely more luminous and rational ideas of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being, and of the religions and moral duties of man, than Paganism had ever given; and which, above all, professed to solve the great problem of the future and final destiny of the human race, by teaching that the present life is only a state of probation, that all mankind are destined to a future and far more perfect state of being; and that all, without distinction, must appear at the bar of the eternal Judge, to give an account of their conduct in this probationary [state of existence, and receive the reward due to their works. The solution of this most important problem, which had so long baffled the efforts of human reason, led to the unravelling of many others, which had exercised the genius, and eluded the researches of the greatest philosophers of every age. The existence of all, under the government of a Being infinitely wise, powerful, and good, was easily accounted for on this principle of the probationary nature of this state of mortal existence, and the remuneration of moral good, with the punishment of moral evil in a future state, where all the seeming disorder of things here below shall terminate. The Christian revelation unravelled those intricate and difficult problems, to which all the genius and learning of philosophers could give no satisfactory solution, and it laid claim to Divine authority to sanction its doctrines. The Pagans

had seen the constancy, the fortitude, and even the cheerfulness with which the Christians suffered the most cruel tortures for their religion; a circumstance for which they were unable to account, and which they would have deemed incredible, had they not been eye-witnesses. The thinking part of the Pagan world could not but be struck with the contemplation of so wonderful a moral phænomenon, and began to think that there might be something in Christianity with which they were unacquainted. It is not possible to fix a more interesting period in the history of the human mind, than the fourth century, comprizing nearly that portion of time which elapsed between the commencement of the great persecution under Diocletian and Maximinian, to the total abolition of Paganism in the reign of Theodosius the Great. During the whole of this period, but more especially during the reign of Constantine, the Roman world was fluctuating between two religious systems, diametrically opposite to each other; for it must be observed, that although Christianity was the religion of the imperial court, from the time of Constantine, except in the short reign of Julian, yet the majority of the people continued Pagans till the reign of Theodosius. It must, above all, be considered, that the question which agitated the minds of men in those days, was not merely concerning philosophical opinions, like those disputes which exercised the reasoning faculties of the learned and inge-

nious in the preceding ages; nor concerning forms and ceremonies, subordinate doctrines, verbal differences, and such other non-essentials, as have excited the cavils of theologians in latter times. The question related to essentials, to fundamental doctrines and ideas; and, in fine, to matters of the utmost importance to mankind. In this fluctuating and uncertain state of the human understanding, in regard to the most serious and interesting concerns of the species, it may with great probability be supposed, that a man of a vigorous intellect, like Constantine, who, although he had been much more instructed in tactics than philosophy, and was tutored by experience in an elevated station, must have sometimes reflected on subjects of such singular importance, both in a political and moral view. He could not have been an unobserving spectator of what was going forward in the world, and of the revolution which was taking place in the ideas of mankind. His circumstances in that momentous crisis of his affairs, when about to dispute the possession of the world, the importance of the contest, and the magnitude of the object, were sufficient to excite reflection, and to induce a person so circumstanced to look up to a power possessing an unlimited control over all mundane events.

When we contemplate the critical situation of Constantine in the point of time alluded to, and presume to hazard a conjecture on the state of his mind, as influenced by such a combination of circumstances, we must allow this delinca-

tion of it, given by historians, to be perfectly consistent with probability, and extremely appropriate to such a character, in such a situation; and in this critical moment the miraculous event of that Emperor's celebrated vision is said to have happened, which, although it has obtained general credit through a long succession of ages, has of late been called in question by several historians and critics: especially by the enemies of Christianity, with whose tenets its authenticity is incompatible.

Every circumstance in the life of so conspicuous a character as Constantine must be interesting. The singular and important event which is supposed to have determined the conduct of that Emperor, in what has had the most decided influence on the condition of mankind in all succeeding ages, merits in a pre-eminent degree, the attention and examination of posterity. It is difficult, it is perhaps impossible, either to ascertain the reality of the fact or to prove it a fiction, with such force of evidence as to silence all objections. All that can be done is to bring forward to distinct inspection the circumstances and arguments which seems to stamp the marks of authenticity upon the relation; as well as those which appear to diminish its credibility. Every one must, from the examination of circumstances and appearances, draw his own conclusions respecting the authenticity of this extraordinary narrative, which, in substance, is thus related:—Constantine being on his march towards Rome,

and revolving in his mind the hazardous nature of his enterprize, and the mysterious dispensation of the Divine Providence, and fully convinced of the all-controlling power of an Omnipotent Being, whose name he knew not how to invoke, and whose favor he knew not how to ask, discovered in the air the figure of a resplendent cross, with this inscription legibly conspicuous : *In hoc signo vinces*. "By this sign thou shalt overcome." Both he and his army were astonished at the sight; but not knowing how to interpret the celestial omen, and finding no satisfactory assurance from the established rules of Pagan interpretation, he still remained in the utmost agitation of mind, between hope and fear, between faith and unbelief. However, it is added, that in the succeeding night Christ himself appeared to the Emperor in his sleep, displaying before his eyes the same triumphant banner of the cross which he had seen in the air the day before, and unequivocally promised him the victory over his antagonist, under its auspices. Constantine immediately adopted the cross as his standard, and caused its figure to be engraved on the shields of his soldiers; and it is certain, that the labarum, or cross, with the mysterious monogram, expressive of the name of Christ, inclosed in a sort of crown, and placed on the top, was used as the imperial standard, both during the reigns of Constantine and of his successors. After this miraculous vision, and drawn by Constantine, full of confidence, marched towards the capital of the world, and at the very

gates of Rome gained that signal victory over Maxentius, which ended in the destruction of the tyrant, and placed the conqueror above all opposition. The success of Constantine is, certain, however doubtful the miracle preceding it may be esteemed.

Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, an historian of great and deserved celebrity, and generally esteemed of unimpeachable veracity, a man of extraordinary erudition, and an intimate confidant of Constantine, is the author of this narrative; and asserts, that he had the relation of that extraordinary circumstance from the Emperor's own mouth, in private conversation; so far the history seems to bear such a stamp of authenticity as few historical relations can boast. Few historians can produce such respectable authority for what they relate.

But after examining the affirmative side of the question, if we turn to the reverse it will appear that Eusebius related the circumstance some years after the death of Constantine, when he could neither attest the truth, nor expose the falsehood of the story. This circumstance, at least if the narrative of Eusebius gave the first intelligence of Constantine's vision, diminishes very much its credibility; for it would, indeed, be very strange if that Emperor had never mentioned so extraordinary an incident to any other person.

But are those who call in question the veracity of Eusebius certain that the public were not informed of that extraordinary vision before that

writer undertook to transmit the particulars of it to posterity? Does it not rather seem that the fact had been published, and had acquired a general notoriety before Eusebius wrote his narrative? The whole circumstance appears to have been of such a nature as to be incapable of concealment. It is represented as having been visible to the whole army, composed of a mixed number of Christians and Pagans; and he is said to have consulted the Pagan priests and soothsayers, as well as the Christian divines, concerning the meaning of the mysterious omen. We are told that the Christians, whom he consulted on the subject of this celestial prodigy, having promised him certain victory under the invincible banner of the cross, he caused the labarum to be made, which he adopted for his military standard. If this be a just representation of the case, the thing was of such a nature that it could not fail of being publicly known and talked of. Indeed it seems as if it had not been a fact of pretty general notoriety, Eusebius durst not have ventured to impose upon the world so romantic a tale, especially in connection with circumstances of so public a nature, and so open to investigation; that supposing it to have been fictitious, it must have been soon exploded and ridiculed, both by Pagans and intelligent Christians.

It appears, however, from pretty good historical evidence, that the labarum was not adopted by Constantine, as his military standard, until many years after this event. Constantine not

being yet sole Emperor, he might, probably, for some particular reasons, think it not proper to make any alteration in the military ensigns of the empire. Without attempting to fix the exact time when the labarum was first brought into use as the imperial standard, unbiassed reason must perceive, and candid impartiality must confess, that this is not an affair of such importance as to be of any weight in estimating the authenticity of the history in question; for when the government of the empire was divided among a plurality of Emperors, it would have been an inconsistent, and, perhaps, a dangerous innovation to adopt the cross for the military ensign of one division of the empire, while the eagles were displayed in another. The most proper time for adopting the cross as the imperial standard, was certainly after a Christian had become sole master of the empire.

With this brief enquiry concerning the authenticity of a miracle which has excited the attention of all succeeding ages, I shall conclude this epistle, and leave you to form your own opinion on so nice a subject of historical discussion.

With unfeigned respect, I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

SIR,

AFTER endeavouring to investigate the motives which determined Constantine to embrace Christianity, and establish it in the Roman empire, by the imperial sanction, those who delight

to trace the history of the human mind, will naturally feel their curiosity excited to enquire into the state of religion during the remainder of this memorable reign; and will, in the course of their enquiries, find abundant matter for observation and reflection.

During the three first centuries, Christianity had, in its gradual progress, as a system uniting a body of men under certain rules and ordinances, undergone divers changes, although its fundamental doctrines continued invariably the same. Principles, founded on the basis of eternal truth, must for ever remain true: Neither lapse of time, nor any change in the circumstances and opinions of men, can make any alteration in the nature of what is intrinsically true. "But a number of forms, ceremonies, and subordinate opinions, are naturally connected with those fixed principles which constitute the basis of religion, and these are variable. In every community, religious or political, certain laws and regulations are necessary for the welfare of its members. The laws and regulations of political governments are calculated for the particular circumstances, moral or physical, of each community, and must be varied in conformity to the variation of circumstances, and the vicissitudes of human affairs. Hence arises the difference of political systems. The ceremonial part of religion, with its particular institutions and ordinances, may likewise be varied according to the various circumstances of different ages and of different nations; and has always

been considered, by moderate and liberal-minded men, as variable without any detriment to leading doctrines and fundamental truths. This marks the distinction between essentials and non-essentials in religion. In the commencement of Christianity, when its professors were few in number, and the general tranquillity of the church undisturbed by the jarring interests of its members, the ecclesiastical system was, as it may reasonably be supposed, of the simplest kind. . In proportion as the number of Christians increased, the various regulations for the maintenance of order were necessarily multiplied. The dignitaries of the church were, at first, elected by the joint suffrages of the clergy and the people; but, in process of time, the tumult and disorder attending popular elections caused the suffrages of the people to be laid aside, and the clergy alone claimed and exercised the right of electing their bishops, but after Constantine had given to the Christian religion the sanction and support of the imperial authority, the election of its prelates came directly, or indirectly, under the control of the Emperor. During the reigns of the Pagan Emperors, the Christians had become a tolerably opulent class of people: but when their religion had received the imperial sanction, a new scene opened in the church under the auspices of Constantine. This was the golden age of Ecclesiastics. Before that important period, some churches had been liberally supported by the devotion and zeal of wealthy individuals; but

yet the situation of the clergy was insecure and contemptible in the eyes of the Pagan world. Afterwards they lived in princely splendor, honored and esteemed as the first rank of men in the empire. Formerly they had been sunk in the gloom of obscurity, but now they basked in the broad sun-shine of honor, wealth, and imperial favor: the contrast between their present and former situations giving their prosperity a higher relish. To a person who contemplates the aspect of the Roman empire, in that age, a new world seems to appear. The system of polytheism and idol-worship, which, from time immemorial had, by its pompous ceremonies and splendid festivals, commanded the veneration of mankind, fell into disrepute; and Christianity, which had so long been the object of universal contempt, and frequently of cruel persecution, at last triumphed over all opposition, and became the established religion of the masters of the world. The Roman empire saw magnificent churches erected for the worship of the crucified God, whose name had so long been despised, and the rites of the Christian religion celebrated with a pomp and solemnity, equal, if not superior, to what had been displayed in the Pagan temples. A total revolution was taking place in the texture of religious opinions, and the combinations of human ideas. What a scene would this have appeared to a Christian of the apostolic age, or of that which immediately succeeded? And how wonderful and striking a spec-

tacle must it have exhibited to those who had lived in the time of the last dreadful persecution under Diocletian, Maximian, and Galerius, and had witnessed the contempt in which the Christian religion had been held, as well as the abject state of its professors! To such observers, however, another part of the scene must have appeared no less extraordinary. They would view, with no small astonishment, the newly acquired opulence and splendor of churchmen. They would see ecclesiastics possessing princely fortunes, and living in a luxurious manner. What would a Christian, whose mind had been formed, whose religious ideas had been modelled, by the simple and disinterested maxims of primitive Christianity, think, on seeing the ministers of the humble and lowly Jesus, who had not a place wherein to shelter his head, display the magnificence of sovereign princes? And what must have been his reflections, on contemplating a system of honor and emolument, set up by the professed followers of one whose whole life was a continued scene of poverty and sufferings, and whose preaching and practice were entirely calculated to inspire all those who embraced his doctrine, with a sovereign contempt for the things of this world.

In the reign of Constantine the church was enriched; but it evidently appears that the spirit of genuine Christianity was, in a great measure, extinguished. The Emperor annexed princely salaries to the different prelacies; and the pre-

lates, and other ecclesiastics, soon began to lose sight, not only of that humiliy and contempt of the world, of which the great Author of their religion had given so striking an example; but also of that diffusive charity and universal benevolence which Christianity so strongly inculcates. Ecclesiastical history, which had hitherto exhibited an horrible and sanguinary scene of the sufferings of the church, under Pagan persecutors, then began to display a not less disgusting view of the persecution of Christians by the hand of Christians, carried on with a cruelty little short, in some instances, of that which the Pagans had before exercised against them.

Before the expiration of the apostolic age, different opinions in religious matters began to arise among Christians. It is not at this distance of time, an easy task to develope the opinions and tenets of those ancient heretics, as most of their writings have been long since lost or destroyed; consequently the knowledge we can have of them must be collected from the representations of their enemies of the orthodox party; and daily experience shews how much controversial writers are prone to misrepresent the doctrines of their opponents. Some of their opinions, however, have been transmitted to us, perhaps without any considerable adulteration, and even adopted by modern sectaries. Cerinthus, a heretic, as he is stiled, who lived before the expiration of the first century, is supposed to be the first who broached the doctrine

of the millenium, founded on some difficult and obscure passages of the Apocalypse. This opinion has travelled down to our times, and is held by a great number of learned, respectable, and pious people; but not with those extravagances attributed to the Corinthians. The Manicheans, who taught the co-eternal existence of a good and an evil principle, were also a conspicuous sect in the primitive ages; and the schism of the Donatists long divided the church into two opposite parties. The different sects of Christians, who have been branded with the name of heretics, are too numerous to be mentioned in a general view of things; much less is it possible to investigate their tenets, as they undoubtedly branched out into a variety of ramifications, which has ever been the case in regard to religious opinions. It may, however, be remarked, that one great, and perhaps principal cause of those various opinions among Christians, was their attempting to blend the speculations of Pagan philosophy, and the prejudices of Jewish tradition, with the doctrines of Christianity. It is an observation which ought not to escape our notice, that all the proselytes to Christianity, having been educated in the Jewish or Pagan religion, and many of them advanced in years at the time of their conversion, it is perfectly consistent with the nature of the human mind, that they should retain many of their ancient prejudices, and that many Jewish and Pagan notions on metaphysical subjects, would be in-

roduced into the Christian system. Ideas once deeply impressed, and remaining long in the mind, are not easily eradicated. Besides, when a number of individuals think and reason on any abstract subject, it is, perhaps, impossible that they should all think alike. It is, indeed, hardly possible, in regard to things which may be brought under the inspection of the senses. The ideas and operations of the human mind are influenced by a thousand adventitious circumstances; different men see things in different points of view, and consequently form different combinations of ideas. By this reason different opinions in religious matters must always exist.

During the predominance of Paganism those quarrels among the Christians were held under restraint: while Christians of every description, orthodox or heterodox, without distinction, saw the sword of persecution drawn against them, or at least suspended over their heads, their mutual rancour was, if not softened, at least confined to the efforts of the pen, or the anathemas of intolerant zeal; but as soon as Christianity, triumphant over the common enemy, had obtained the sanction, and could claim the support of the imperial authority, the different sects of Christians began to manifest towards one another a degree of animosity, almost equal to the rancour of Pagan persecution.

The difference of opinion on theological subjects, which caused the greatest division in the church, a division of the longest duration, and

which makes the most conspicuous figure in the history of the Christian religion, of any that had happened prior to the reformation begun by Luther, was that which is commonly known by the name of the Arian heresy. Of all the philosophers of antiquity, Plato had permitted his sublime genius to take the most daring flights, in attempting to explore the incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being, the great first cause and self-existent Author of all existence. This Athenian philosopher having elevated his mind to the contemplation of the Deity, could not otherwise comprehend the divine essence than under the threefold modifications of infinite power, perfect wisdom, and diffusive goodness. Those conceptions he expressed by the names of the Great First Cause, or Origin of All—the eternal Reason or Wisdom, which he called *Logos*—and the Soul or Spirit, which pervades and animates the universe. His poetical imagination personified those abstract ideas; and in the Platonic system those three original principles are represented as three distinct beings, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; coequal, coeternal, and indissolubly united, forming a mysterious triad in one incomprehensible unity.

This sublime and mysterious definition of the Divine Nature is denominated the Trinity of the Platonists, and comes nearer to the fundamental doctrines of revelation than could be expected from the efforts of unassisted reason. St. Augustine, with others of the primitive fathers,

admiring the sublime conception of Plato, says, that with a trifling change, that great philosopher might be deemed a Christian; and the Platonists asserted, that the beginning of St. John's gospel was an exact transcript of his principles.

The sanction given by scriptural testimony to the fundamental principles of Plato's theology was a strong inducement to the learned Christians, of the second and third centuries, to study the writings of that incomparable philosopher, whose penetrating and comprehensive genius was supposed to have anticipated the doctrines of revelation, and formed those conceptions of the divine essence which the Christian system sanctioned and confirmed. The remote consequences, and possible inferences of Plato's hypothesis, were investigated in all their ramifications; and subtle and inexplicable questions were raised and agitated concerning the nature, equality, and distinction of the Divine Persons of the indivisible triad and mysterious unity, questions undoubtedly above the comprehension of the most exalted human understanding; but yet the prying and restless curiosity of philosophers excited them to explore the secrets of the profound abyss; and the same spirit of curiosity actuated the Christian theologians, and the Pagan philosophers, in the schools of Athens and Alexandria.

These enquiries, concerning the mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the Deity, had

exercised the minds of the learned Pagans merely as philosophical speculations. The case was altered when the same enquiries began to engross the attention of Christian Divines. When the eternal Logos, the Word, or the Son of God, had been revealed as the object of the faith and religious worship of mankind, and the basis of their hopes, a clear conception, or rather an implicit belief of these unfathomable mysteries, was deemed essential to their eternal interests. These subtle disquisitions became general, agitating the minds of Christians every where, and at last threw the whole church into a state of confusion and discord. Christians were in doubt what opinion they ought to entertain concerning the nature and person of Christ. These points had not yet been determined by the authority of the united and universal church; and every one modelled his opinion by the light of his own understanding. The majority held the doctrine of the Divine Nature of Christ; and the perfect equality of the three Persons of the Trinity; while a very numerous body, with Arius, a priest of Constantinople at their head, maintained that the Son is essentially distinct from the Father, and subordinate to him; that he is a spontaneous and dependent being, created by the supreme will of the Father, and begotten before all worlds; that the father had impressed upon him the effulgence of his glory, and transfused into him the fulness of his spirit: that he was the framer of the world, and that he governs the

universe in obedience and subordination to the first Person of the Trinity, his Father and Sovereign. Such were the abstruse doctrines and intricate questions which agitated the Christian world, and disturbed the tranquillity of the church, during the long period of almost three hundred years; but especially in the fourth century, when the worshippers of the God of mercy and love, the pretended imitators of the peaceable and benevolent Redeemer, having acquired the support of secular power, divided themselves into opposite and hostile parties, thundering out curses against each other, in the name of Him, who, from Heaven, descended upon earth to bless mankind.

It may easily be conceived that Constantine, on seeing the professors of Christianity divided into two opposite factions, could not, without regret, contemplate those divisions which rent the church, and disgraced that religion which he had made it so much the object of his endeavours to establish. In order to settle the dispute, and ascertain the real principles of the Christian faith, he convoked the celebrated Council of Nice, A. D. 325, which consisted of 318 bishops and other ecclesiastics, to the number of 2043. After a session of two months, in which the Emperor frequently assisted in person, the opinions of Arius were condemned, the equality of the three Persons of the Divine Trinity was declared the true doctrine, and the resolutions of this council, comprised in the Ni-

cene Creed, were published, as the obligatory and only orthodox Creed of the Christian church.

Constantine had, before he embraced the Christian religion, established liberty of conscience upon the broadest and most rational basis; nor does it appear that he ever exercised any kind of persecution against the Pagans, nor would such a measure, indeed, have been consistent with good policy, as, during the whole of his reign, they composed a vast majority of his subjects. However, soon after the council of Nice, he began to persecute the Arians. He banished Arius into Illyrium, and excluded the Arian clergy from the rewards and immunities so liberally bestowed on the Catholics. He afterwards issued an edict, absolutely prohibiting all assemblies of Arians, and other dissenters, under pain of confiscation of property. This was the first disgusting instance of the persecution of Christians by Christians armed with secular power; but the example has been followed by a long train of imitations. There is, however, no doubt of the Emperor's conduct, in this respect, being swayed by the insinuations of ecclesiastics, whose secret motives he was not able to discover; and better skilled in marshalling, and conducting an army, than in the stratagems of theological warfare, he might easily be impelled by their councils to violent and even contradictory measures. In fact, we see him, at the instigation of a faction of bishops, recall-

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ing Arius ; and so far misled by an exhibition of false charges, as to persecute Athanasius, the champion of the council of Nice, and the strenuous assertor of its doctrines, which the Emperor zealously supported, and considered as the orthodox representation of the Christian faith.

The reign of Constantine teems with great and important events ; among which may be reckoned, the building of Constantinople on the site of the ancient Byzantium, and the removal of the seat of empire from Rome to that new capital. The residence of the Imperial Court had, in fact, been removed from Rome about thirty years before. The associate Emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, did not reside at Rome : the former resided at Nicomedia, and the latter mostly at Milan. Galerius resided at Nicomedia ; Constantius Chlorus at York ; and during the space of thirty years before the foundation of Constantinople, Rome had seldom enjoyed the presence of her emperors.

The removal of the imperial residence from Rome to Constantinople has been exceedingly censured by many writers, and assigned as one of the principal causes of the downfall of the empire. This point is, however, very difficult to determine. We cannot be assured ; we cannot, from general appearances, even suppose that the subversion of the empire would not have happened as soon if the imperial residence had continued at Rome. The reasons which induced Constantine to fix it at Byzantium, in

preference to Rome, are equally unknown. It is supposed, that Diocletian and Maximian, having concerted a plan of administration, more regularly and systematically despotic than that of any of the preceding Emperors, and being desirous of abolishing all the republican forms which still existed, and of setting entirely aside the nominal authority which the senate still possessed, had fixed their residence at a distance from the ancient metropolis of the empire, in order to avoid being incommoded by the petitions, representations, and remonstrances of that august body. Constantine was, probably, actuated in some degree by the same motives; for his administration was still more despotic than that of Diocletian and Maximian; and he completed that system of despotism which those Emperors had begun. Before the joint reign of the above-mentioned Emperors, the senate had generally been consulted, at least for the sake of form, although that did not alter the real despotism of the government: for the senate scarcely ever failed of being conformable to the will of the Emperor, while the Emperor himself was at the disposal of the prætorian guards, or the legionary soldiers. Diocletian, soon after his accession, adopted the mode of transacting affairs without the formality of consulting the senate; and after Constantine had removed the seat of empire to Constantinople, the senatorial dignity was no more than an honorary title, and the senate could scarcely be reckoned a consti-

tuted order in the state. Some attribute Con-
 stantine's choice of a new capital to a dislike he
 had taken against Rome, on account of the en-
 thusiastic attachment of that city to paganism.
 It must, however, be confessed, that the situa-
 tion of Constantinople was, in almost every res-
 pect, infinitely preferable to that of Rome; and,
 in taking a view of the extent, situation, and cir-
 cumstances of the Roman dominions, Constau-
 tinople and Milan must have presented them-
 selves as the most eligible stations for the com-
 manders of the military force of the empire.
 Milan, situated near the northern frontier of
 Italy, was a post peculiarly adapted for that pur-
 pose; for there the Emperor might always be
 in readiness to repel the predatory inroads of
 the German nations, who, in the reign of Au-
 relianus, had thrown Rome itself into a state of
 alarm and consternation. And Constantinople
 was the most eligible situation in the whole em-
 pire, both as a check to the Persians, and as a
 barrier against the incursions of the Goths,
 those terrible enemies of Rome, who, in their
 wicker boats, issuing from the mouths of the
 Danube, frequently sailed through the Bospho-
 rus and the Hellespont, plundering and desolat-
 ing Greece and Asia Minor; and, in the reign
 of Gallienus, threatened nothing less than the
 entire devastation of all the eastern parts of the
 empire, from the Euphrates to the Adriatic sea.
 That formidable invasion was not, without great
 difficulty, and prodigious slaughter, at last re-

pelled by the military abilities and vigorous efforts of the Emperor Claudius; and in the reign of Probus, the Germans having made a dreadful eruption into Gaul, were driven out by that Emperor with an incredible slaughter. From that time, however, the Goths and Germans were terrible enemies to the Roman empire. Having tasted the rich plunder of its provinces, they never failed to seize every opportunity of making predatory incursions. For that reason the residence of the Emperors, with the main body of the military force at Milan, or in some station in the eastern provinces, not far from the Danube and the Euxine sea, was more necessary, and more conducive to the safety of the empire, than if it had always been fixed at Rome.

If we consider, not only the geographical position, but also the topographical situation of Constantinople, with the beautiful and picturesque arrangement of the land and water, which form its environs, we shall easily be convinced of the eligibility of its situation, and of the preference due to it when compared with that of Rome. They are both in a temperate climate, Rome being situated in $41^{\circ}, 50'$ North latitude; and Constantinople in $41^{\circ}, 10'$ North latitude. Constantinople is situated on an elevated ground, consisting of gently swelling eminences, rising like terraces one above another, without any of those deep vallies which separate the seven hills on which Rome is seated; and which, together

with the marshes adjoining to the Tyber, render the air unwholesome. The city was laid out in a triangular form, and filled the triangle formed by the harbour, the Bosphorus, and the Propontis, or Sea of Marmora. The harbour, on the north side of the city, is secure and capacious, being five hundred yards wide at its entrance, from the Bosphorus, and runs seven miles into the land. From the Euxine sea to the Seraglio point, the whole length of the Bosphorus extends about 18 miles, and its ordinary breadth about a mile and a half; but in many places somewhat broader, and in some much narrower, with several beautiful windings. In sailing up the Propontis, towards Constantinople, the most enchanting prospects charm the eye of the Navigator, who, from every part of that sea, may discover the high lands of either Thrace or Bythisica, and never lose sight of Mount Olympus, till at last the city itself, rising from the strand, attracts his view, and exhibits the most magnificent appearance. Constantinople may, by its situation, command the commerce of the vast regions of the North, by means of the Euxine sea, and the rivers Don and Dnieper which discharge themselves into it. By the streight of the Hellespont, which forms the communication between the Propontis and the Mediterranean, as the Bosphorus opens a passage from the Euxine sea to the Propontis, it is equally well situated for the trade of the south and west; and when Egypt is under its dominion, its position is extremely advantageous in respect of the trade to

India and the eastern coasts of Africa. In fine, geographers commonly tell us, that Constantinople is the most eligible situation for commerce that can any where be found; and when we cast our eyes upon the map, its geographical position seems to indicate the same. We may, however, be imposed on by unqualified descriptions and general appearances. Geographers, as well as historians, are not always correct; and the omission of one single circumstance will sometimes alter very much the description, as the want or distortion of one single object, changes materially the appearance of the picture or landscape. The situation of Constantinople, considered in a commercial point of view, has one great defect, and is, in that respect, much inferior to London, Lisbon, and several other ports. The length of the Hellespont is not less than sixty miles, and its ordinary breadth not more than three miles, but in many places much narrower. A strong current sets through the Bosphorus, the Propontis, and the Hellespont, from the Euxine sea, into the Grecian Archipelago, and a strong north wind often blows in that region during several months; which, together with a strong current setting in the same direction, through so narrow a streight, sometimes render Constantinople, for a long time together, almost inaccessible to vessels coming from the Mediterranean. Those ports, which are situated on the ocean, or on large rivers, which have an immediate communication with

it, have a great advantage over those which are situated on the inland seas; such as the Mediterranean, Euxine, Baltic, &c. or on the rivers which fall into them, in having the tides to facilitate the approach and entrance of vessels in case of a calm or contrary winds; whereas the latter, in similar cases, possess not that advantage; and if a strong wind sets in the same direction with a strong current, their aggregate force is so great, that it is almost impossible to make head against it. This is the great disadvantage of the commercial situation of Constantinople, which the strong north winds that often blow in those parts, the rapid current always setting from the Euxine, and the long and narrow streight of the Hellespont, all combine, at certain times, to render it almost unapproachable. It must however, be granted, that Constantinople enjoys an excellent commercial situation, although not the best that can be found, as it has been often asserted. Its position was also the most eligible that Constantine could have chosen for his new capital, it being a most commanding post for repelling the attacks of the enemies of the empire, and almost unequalled in regard to the amenity and beauty of its situation.

Although historians may conjecture that the removal of the imperial residence contributed to hasten the downfall of the empire, it is a certain fact, that the fixing of it at Constantinople put a final period to the passage of the barbari-

ans through the Bosphorus, who could never after force that insurmountable barrier; and Greece, as well as Asia Minor, was secure from their ravages, until Valens unadvisedly suffered the Goths to pass the Danube, and received their armed bands into the heart of the empire. In after ages Constantinople presented an insurmountable obstacle to the progress of the Persians, under Chosroes, and resisted all the attacks of the Avans, the Goths, and other northern enemies. During the existence of the Caliphate, that city was the bulwark of Europe against the Saracens; and fell a prey to the Turks so late as A. D. 1453, one thousand and forty-three years after Rome was taken and plundered by Alaric, and nine hundred and seventy-seven years after the entire subversion of the western empire. Indeed no good reason can be given why the empire might not have been as well defended, when Constantinople was the capital, as if Rome had always retained that prerogative; and it is no improbable conjecture, that if the imperial residence had not been removed to Constantinople, all the eastern parts of the empire would have fallen a prey to the Persians, on the one hand, and to the Goths on the other, without prolonging for any considerable time, the existence of the western empire.

Among the reflections which naturally arise from the contemplation of a period so important, and so interesting to posterity as the reign of Constantine, it is impossible not to remark,

that, while he governed the Roman empire with a more distinguished lustre than most of his predecessors, and was uniformly successful in every political measure, as he had invariably been in every military enterprise, his personal tranquillity was considerably disturbed by the disputes of theologians, and the intrigues of ecclesiastics. His domestic felicity also suffered a melancholy abatement, from the necessity he found, or imagined that he found himself under, of putting to death his son Crispus, a prince of the most promising accomplishments; whose mind had been formed by the precepts of the learned and eloquent Lactantius, who had been trained to arms under the victorious banners of his imperial father, and had signalized his courage and conduct in so conspicuous a manner, in the memorable forcing of the passage of the Hellespont, in the last and decisive contest between Constantine and Licinius. The particulars of this melancholy transaction are variously related by historians; and the whole affair seems to have been conducted in so mysterious a manner, that we can be certain of nothing but the fact itself, without being able to develop the circumstances which were the cause of it. This reflection, however, we cannot but make, that it was either a great crime of Constantine, or a great misfortune to him. Hard must his heart have been, if he could thus destroy so accomplished and promising a son, without a full conviction of the absolute necessity of so severe a measure; and he must be pronounced extremely unfortu-

nate if such necessity did really exist. It is, however, a remarkable fact, that some of the greatest men, both in ancient and modern times, have been extremely unhappy in their domestic concerns. The rebellion of Absalom against his father David, and its tragical issue ; the murder of Sennacherib, in the temple of the god Nisrich, by the hands of his own sons Adrammelech and Sharezar ; the severities which Augustus Cæsar was obliged to use against his only child, his daughter Julia, on account of her scandalous life ; and the havoc which Herod the Great made in his own family, by the execution of his beautiful and beloved wife Mariamne, his two most promising sons, and others of his near relatives, may be adduced as instances, among a great number of others which occur in ancient history, that the highest degrees of human power, exaltation, and splendor, do not always exempt their possessors from domestic infelicity, no more than from personal misfortunes and the ordinary sufferings of mortality. To these instances, and many others in ancient history, may be added a number of a similar nature, in more modern times ; among which the tragical catastrophe of Don Carlos, son of Philip the Second of Spain ; and that of the Czarowitz, son of the immortal Peter the Great, of Russia, stand as conspicuous and distinguished proofs of the uncertain and fluctuating nature of all human felicity.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XV.

SIR,

I CONCLUDED my last with some serious and striking reflections on the uncertainty of human greatness as a source of personal felicity. The subsequent state of Rome from this epoch of its unparalleled power and grandeur which we have just been contemplating, will exhibit a memorable instance, that the greatness of nations, as well as of individuals, is liable to the most melancholy and striking vicissitudes; and that national, as well as individual prosperity and felicity, are of an uncertain tenure.

Our observations being now brought forward to that period when Rome, being no longer considered as the seat of empire, had passed the meridian of her splendour, and saw her glory begin to diminish, our curiosity is naturally excited to examine the state of that celebrated city, when in the acmé of its greatness. It would be a pleasing gratification if any of the ancient writers had furnished us with the means of comparing the most remarkable cities of the ancient world, with those of modern times, especially in regard to population. This is a desideratum in history which cannot be obtained; and it is particularly surprising, that none of the Roman historians have left us any account of the population of Rome. It could not indeed be supposed that their calculations, in this res-

pect, would have been exact, but they might certainly have met with authentic documents, sufficient to have enabled them to come to a tolerably near approximation, in computing the number of the inhabitants of that celebrated metropolis of the world: and if their computations had not been very wide of the truth, they might at least have regulated our conjectures. The moderns, who have examined the subject, and given us the result of their researches, have differed so widely in their opinions on the subject, that their conjectures tend rather to mislead than to direct us in forming any conclusion. To point out a few of them, will shew how widely they disagree, and how little we can depend on their representations. Mr. Martin says, in his travels, that, in the reign of the first Claudius, the inhabitants of Rome amounted to 6,986,000; but, says he, those of the suburbs must be taken into the reckoning, and they extended to the distance of forty miles. The same author then tells us, that the city is about thirteen miles in circuit round the walls; some say fifteen. He then adds, that Rome, before the time of Aurelian, was only nine miles in circuit, and had undergone very little alteration in that respect since the reign of Servius Tullius. In Mr. Martin's statement of the population of Rome, there must be a gross error, unless he include in his account of the suburbs, most of the towns and villages of Campania. His mistake seems to have originated from the

Census of the Roman citizens, taken in the reign of Claudius, who succeeded Caligula in the empire. This Census amounted to about 6,945,000: but it is to be observed, that this was not the number of inhabitants in the city of Rome, but that of the free Roman citizens, dispersed throughout the whole empire, and which, as Mr. Gibbon observes, might, with a proportionate number of women and children, amount to about 20,000,000. Mr. Gibbon, describing the city of Rome as it existed under the imperial government, says, "The circuit of the walls was accurately measured by the Mathematician Ammonius, and found to be twenty-one miles, and lying almost in a circular form." The architect, Vitruvius, who flourished in the reign of Augustus, says, that the innumerable habitations of the Roman people would have spread themselves far beyond the limits of the city, and that the ground being contracted on every side by the villas and gardens of the opulent citizens, suggested the common expedient of raising the houses to an exceeding great height; so that it was repeatedly enacted, by Augustus and Nero, that private edifices should not exceed the height of seventy feet from the ground; but the successive testimonies of Pliny and others, prove the insufficiency of those edicts to restrain the inhabitants of Rome from carrying their houses to an enormous height. Many families were lodged in one house, or *insula*, as at Paris; a different family occupied each story.

Some modern authors assert, that in the reign of Augustus, Rome was fifty miles in circuit, and contained 463,000 men able to bear arms; which, with a proportionate number of women, children, old men, &c. would make the number of inhabitants not less than three millions. That accurate writer, M. de Messance in his *Recherches sur la Population*, assigns to Paris, 23,563 houses, 71,124 families, and 576,000 inhabitants; and Mr. Gibbon says, that if we calculate the number of inhabitants of ancient Rome, according to the principles of M. de Messance, we may estimate them about the number of 1,200,000, a calculation not improbable; a number not excessive for that metropolis of the world, although much exceeding the population of the greatest cities of modern Europe. From all these disagreeing accounts and random conjectures, no calculation, in the least degree approximating to exactness, can be made. The total number of houses is, however, accurately stated in a description of Rome, composed in the reign of Theodosius, between fifty and sixty years after the translation of the seat of empire to Constantinople, and consequently at a time when the ancient capital must be presumed to have been on the decline. In that statement, the number of domus, or houses of the grandees, was 1780; and the number of insulae, or plebeian habitations, was 46,602. In estimating the population of Rome, the best ground we have to go upon is the mode of

building, which was to carry their houses to an enormous height, as already observed; the extent of the city, and the number of houses and streets. If the wall of Aurelian enclosed the vast circuit of twenty-one miles, the city was of a vast extent; and if its form had been perfectly circular, as it nearly was, would have contained thirty-seven square miles and three quarters within that circumference, a space nearly twice as large as that occupied by London and its suburbs. So great an extent, with houses carried to such an height, indicates a vast population; but the streets of Rome were few in number, not exceeding four hundred and twenty-four; a circumstance which would make it appear that a considerable quantity of ground was taken up by the back-yards and other appurtenances. The number of houses, however, of which we have an exact account taken in the reign of Theodosius, seems to shew that there could not be much waste ground; for, according to this description, the extent of Rome was not twice as much as that of Paris; and yet the houses in the former city were more than double the number of those in the latter. In an octavo edition of one of our popular books of geography, where the population of London is estimated at one million, or eleven hundred thousand, which, however, has been found to be an exaggerated calculation, this marginal note has been annexed:—"neither of the ancient cities of Babylon, or Nineveh, nor even ancient Rome it-

self, had ever a commerce sufficient to employ and supply so vast a number of inhabitants." This, however, is reasoning upon very random suppositions. Of Nineveh we know little or nothing, except what may be gathered from the book of the prophet Jonas, where it is described as an exceeding great city, of three days journey, but whether in length or in circuit we are not informed, although we must suppose that the latter is meant. It is also there said, that it contained an hundred and twenty thousand persons, who could not distinguish between the right hand and the left, which must be understood of young children. If Nineveh was three days journey in circuit, we must suppose it to have been built on an extensive and open plan, like Babylon, and perhaps even more spread abroad than the latter city. That this was probably the case, appears from the additional circumstance mentioned in the same book, that it also contained much cattle, which may authorise a supposition that a considerable extent of country was inclosed within the walls of the city; and whether the hint given in the above-mentioned place of its population, ought to be understood in a literal sense, or regarded as an hyperbolical expression, in the oriental style, every one is at liberty to form his own opinion. Of Babylon we know as little, in regard to its population, or its means of supply and employment for its inhabitants, as we do of Nineveh, except that the great quantity of open ground within the squares, formed by the intesections

of the streets, furnished a considerable supply of the necessaries of life ; but the open plan of that city affords an unquestionable proof, that its population could bear no proportion to its extent, according to our notions of the population of large towns ; and that the inhabitants could not be so numerous, nor, perhaps, half so numerous, as those of London. But from the extent of Rome, and the number of habitations it contained, which amounted to more than double the number of those in Paris, the number of its inhabitants must have considerably exceeded the population of any city of the modern world ; for whatever romantic stories we have read in our common books of geography, concerning the population of Constantinople, Cairo, and Peking, it is certain that not one of those cities is equal to London in the number of inhabitants. By the most authentic documents, on which we can found a calculation, it plainly appears, that Constantinople cannot contain more people than Paris ; and that neither of them contain so many as London, including the suburbs, and the city of Westminster. Peking is now, undoubtedly, the largest city in the world. Mr. Anderson, in his relation of Lord Macartney's embassy to China, says, " that it is a square of nine miles every way ;" but he adds, " that the streets are 140 feet wide, and houses, except those of the Mandarins, only one story high ; from which circumstances we may easily conclude, that notwithstanding its immense extent, its population

cannot equal that of London ; and it is a strange misapprehension of some, who, while they suppose that neither Nineveh, Babylon, or Rome could have a trade sufficient to employ and supply so many inhabitants as London contains, give to Pekin, the inland situation of which is still less favorable to commerce, a population twice as numerous as that of our metropolis. It would only be a reasonable question to ask those writers, how Pekin provides employment, and supplies for two millions of inhabitants, if ancient Rome, the metropolis of the civilized world, could not employ and supply the half of that number. But the population of great cities is estimated strangely at random, in many of our geographical books. Some compute the population of Paris at 800,000, others at 500,000, and others at 600,000, which last calculation seems to be the nearest approximation to truth. The number of inhabitants in Moscow, which, excepting Pekin, is perhaps the most extensive city of the modern world, has been much exaggerated, even to the incredible number of a million ; and even those of Petersburg have frequently been computed at 400,000 ; but Mr. Cox, a most intelligent traveller and accurate observer, assigns 120,000 to Petersburg, and 400,000 to Moscow. But ancient Rome, as far as we can form an idea, from the imperfect descriptions of it yet extant, especially from the number of its houses, the best criterion whereby to estimate its population, appears to have been built on a

very different plan from that of Moscow or Pekin; as also from that of Babylon of old, and seems to have been as much crowded with inhabitants as either London or Paris; and if we may be permitted to hazard a conjecture, from existing circumstances collectively considered, its population cannot be supposed to have been much less than that of these two cities taken together, and which amounts to about one million and a half. As to the observation in the marginal note before alluded to, that Rome had not a commerce sufficient to employ and maintain so vast a number, it appears to be founded on the erroneous supposition, that ancient Rome was a commercial city like London, and subsisted in the same manner by trade; whereas, the case was directly the contrary. London draws a great part of its wealth from commerce; but Rome acquired the whole of hers from violence and rapine. London is an emporium of commerce; Rome was, in plain language, a den of robbers, the residence of the plunderers of the world. London, however, as much as it is enriched by foreign traffic, is also as much enriched, and its numerous inhabitants obtain as much, or even more employment from its internal commerce, from the circumstance of its being the residence of the court, and of the nobility and gentry; and in consequence of its being the capital of England, would be a large, rich, and populous city, without the advantages of foreign traffic. The

capital of a wealthy and extensive empire, where an opulent and splendid nobility fix their residence, must always have a brisk trade within itself, and attract a great number of inhabitants, to whom it gives employment, in providing for the conveniences and luxuries of the opulent. It is chiefly this internal trade that gives employment to the numerous inn-keepers, shop-keepers, and mechanics of our metropolis. Paris affords a striking illustration of this argument. That great capital is so situated as to possess no commercial advantages; and yet, in splendor and shew, it surpasses every other city in the world, and is inferior to none, except London, in population. This arises entirely from its having long been the metropolis of a great and flourishing nation, the residence of a brilliant court, and a numerous and opulent nobility; and the general resort of the nobility and gentry of other countries. All these advantages appertained in an eminent degree to Rome. That city, during almost seven hundred years of successful war and rapine, had accumulated the wealth of all the surrounding nations. No one, who has the least acquaintance with history, can be ignorant of the immense riches, and extravagant expenditure of some of her principal citizens. The luxurious and splendid style in which the grandees of Rome lived, and the superb edifices every where erected, would necessarily employ a great number of artisans of every kind. The countries, of which London

and Paris are the capitals, are of small extent and population, when compared with the Roman empire. London is the metropolis of a country enriched by commerce, and her merchants vie, in opulence, with the nobility of most countries; but it is very doubtful whether the wealth of London, including all her rich traders, be equal to that of the opulent citizens of ancient Rome. There is no doubt, but the persons of landed property in Rome, were far more numerous, and possessors of far greater estates, than those who reside in any modern capital. In regard to employment and supplies, the poorer class of citizens were not only free from taxes, but drew almost an entire maintenance from the tributary donations; and the opulence and luxury of the wealthy would give employment and support to a numerous mixed mass of people from the provinces, who, acquiring fortunes, would in time vie with the grandes themselves, as it is frequently seen in great cities. From these principles of reasoning, grounded on well-known circumstances, and authorized by a mass of authentic historical evidence, it plainly appears, that any comparison between Rome and London, founded on the respective commerce of those two cities, must be absurd. There is not the least resemblance in their political or social circumstances, their œconomy or mode of supplies. London flourishes by commerce, Rome flourished by her former rapine; and, like London, Paris, and all other great capitals,

could not fail of having with herself a very brisk internal trade, of which the effects cannot be calculated with any degree of accuracy.

These observations on the population of ancient Rome, will, I believe, be considered as not ill grounded: at least the conjectures carry the appearance of strong probability.

With every sentiment of unfeigned respect,
I am, Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XVI.

SIR,

AFTER endeavouring, from the broken hints and scattered fragments of historians, to delineate the aspect of the Roman empire, from the commencement of the imperial government under Augustus, as far as to the end of the brilliant and important reign of Constantine, let us now proceed to take a general view of the events which took place after the death of that Emperor, in order to trace not only the political history of the empire, but also the revolutions of human ideas.

It is well known, that Constantine supposing, undoubtedly, that the Roman empire was sufficiently extensive to furnish an ample patrimony for all his descendants, incurred the fatal mistake of dividing its vast domain among his three sons, Constantius, Constans, and Constantine. Within three years after their father's death, Constans

invaded the dominions of his brother Constantine, who being drawn into an ambuscade, and slain, left Constans in possession of two-thirds of the Roman world; but soon after, Magnentius, revolting against Constans, surprised him in hunting, and put him to death. Magnentius being, in the next place, defeated by Constantius, terminated his life by suicide; and thus, by the disastrous fate of his brothers, Constantius became sole Emperor, A. D. 353. It is, at this time, to little purpose to examine the particular circumstances which gave rise to those civil wars, or determined their issue, this, however, we cannot but observe, that by those fatal divisions the strength of the empire was exhausted, and Roman valour and discipline turned against himself, instead of being employed against the enemies of the state.

Constantius dying, A. D. 361, Julian, commonly called the Apostate, son of Julius Constantius, and nephew of the great Constantine, assumed the imperial purple. The short reign of this Emperor displays a signal instance of the wonderful dispensations of Providence in favor of the Christian religion, which merits the attention and observation of posterity. This Emperor, marching against the Persians, was so insatuated by his ideas and expectations of conquest, as to destroy the fleet of boats which he had upon the Tigris, and rashly shut himself up in the hostile country, where he suffered himself to be allured by spies; who feigned

themselves to be deserters from the king of Persia, to advance far into the Persian territories ; being made vainly to believe that the king durst not face him in the field, but was flying before him. This farce was carried on until the Roman army having advanced very far into an unknown country, was, at last, involved in the midst of sandy deserts, and began to feel the effects of famine. At this critical juncture their guides suddenly disappeared, and the Persian monarch made his appearance with the whole military force of his kingdom. The improvident Emperor then discovered his error. The want of provisions rendered a retreat necessary ; betwixt that measure, and perishing with famine, there was no alternative. The retreat was accordingly begun, during which they were continually harassed by the Persians, who carefully avoided any close engagement. The heavy armed legions were neither accustomed to, nor equipped for, this desultory mode of fighting, and could make no impression on the Persian cavalry, which made incessant attacks, and precipitate retreats, and were no sooner repulsed than they immediately rallied and renewed the engagement. The Roman army, which, at its entrance into Persia, was one of the finest that the empire had ever sent out, now exhibited a shocking spectacle of distress. In those disastrous circumstances the Romans at last gained the banks of the Tigris, which, for want of their boats which Julian had madly destroyed, they

could not pass. Military history does not record, and imagination itself can hardly conceive, a more distressful situation than that of the Roman army, exhausted with fatigue, and perishing with hunger ; a deep and rapid river in front, and the whole armed power of Persia in their rear. In those circumstances the Persian king made, in the night, a general assault on the Roman camp. All was a scene of tumultuous confusion and promiscuous slaughter, until at last Roman valour proved successful in repulsing the enemy ; but, amidst the confusion of that dreadful night, the Emperor received a mortal wound, which, in a few hours, terminated his existence, and compelled him to appear before the tribunal of that Judge whose worship he had resolved to abolish, and whose name he had designed to obliterate from the minds of men. We have been told that Julian, taking a handful of his own blood, threw it up towards heaven, 'exclaiming, *Vicisti Galilæe, vicisti!* "Thou hast conquered, O Galilæan ; Thou hast conquered !" Galilæan being the name by which he contemptuously called Christ. This story has been universally circulated, and pretty generally believed. It has something of a romantic cast, but is not, on that account, the less probable, as it was suited to the character of that Emperor. However, although this story be not in itself improbable, when we consider Julian's aversion against the name and religion of Jesus, it is a circumstance concerning which

historians might easily be misinformed, among the various reports which would undoubtedly be circulated relative to an event of such importance as the death of Julian, in a situation so critical and interesting to the empire, and especially to the Christian party. This consideration ought to render us cautious how we admit, as indubitable truths, such assertions as have, perhaps, no other basis than a vague report, or mere imagination. The death of the Emperor Julian is, however, an event which merits particular notice; and, perhaps, contributes not a little to influence the religious state of Europe at this day. There is no doubt but he had conceived the design of extirpating the Christian religion; and if Providence had permitted his reign to have been long and prosperous, like those of Constantine, and some few more of the Emperors, it is impossible to calculate how fatal its effects might have been to Christianity; for one very important circumstance distinguishes Julian from all the former persecuting Emperors. It has already been observed, that, among all the pagan Emperors, very few, if any, had been persecutors from personal inclination. Some of them were favorably disposed to the Christians; and others were indifferent about the matter, and would never have turned their attention to the professors of Christianity, had they not been influenced by the suggestions of priests, and other interested persons. Julian, on the contrary, was a persecutor from principle. He had been educated in the Christian

religion, and had not only apostatized from its doctrines, but manifested the most rooted aversion against Christianity, which he had already begun to take the most decisive, and apparently the most effectual measures to extirpate. From such an enemy the church had reason to expect a more determined and persevering hostility than from these pagan Emperors, who had no personal enmity against Christianity, or its professors. The death of such a man, in so critical a moment, may, therefore, be looked upon as a distinguished link in that mysterious chain of causes and effects which constitutes the plan of Divine Providence. It is impossible to calculate exactly the possible effects of moral causes. It is even difficult to develop their actual consequences, through all their various combinations. Had not, however, the circumstances of the modern world been influenced by the events which took place in the reign of Constantine, and by the disastrous fate of Julian, we might, at this day, have bended the knee before the gods of pagan Rome, or prostrated ourselves before the Woden, Thor, and other grim idols of the northern nations.

It may be remarked, that if Julian had appointed, or the army elected another Emperor, of principles equally averse to Christianity, his death would not have dispelled the storm that was gathering on the Christian horizon; but Julian being influenced by a superstitious opinion that his untimely fate was a mark of the wrath of the gods, was apprehensive of incurring

still more their displeasure, if he presumed to nominate his successor ; and Jovian, a Christian officer, was elected Emperor ; who, in the perishing situation of the army, was obliged to conclude a disadvantageous peace with Persia, and to purchase a safe retreat by the cession of Mesopotamia, the strong city of Nisibis, &c. We are not informed of any objection being made against Jovian's religion by the soldiers, nor have we any historical documents whereby to judge, whether the Christians or the Pagans composed the majority of the army. It is, however, certain, that a very great number of Christians served under the banners of Julian, the avowed enemy of Christianity, as a numerous mass of pagans followed the standard of Constantine, the subverter of their religion ; and as we have already observed it to be a matter of surprise, that no revolt of the pagans ever happened in the time of Constantine, so it appears equally remarkable, that the Christians never manifested any disposition to oppose the measures of Julian. It seems as if the doctrines of non-resistance and passive obedience had been the common creed of both Christians and Pagans in that early age.

The Emperor Jovian, dying soon after his election, and the conclusion of the peace with Persia, Valentinian, another Christian commander, was decorated with the imperial purple, and associated his brother Valens as his colleague in the empire, assigning to him the eastern part, while he himself ruled the west. In

the reign of Valens a singular event took place, which is by many judicious historians, esteemed the first step in the subversion of the empire. The Huns, a Tartar nation, being driven out of their own country by the Siempi, after a number of migrations, came like a torrent upon the Goths, on the north side of the Danube. The country being subdued, an immense crowd of Goths presented themselves on the banks of that river, requesting an asylum in the Roman dominions. This being granted, on condition of delivering up their arms and their children: the children, at least those of rank, were accordingly delivered up as hostages; but through the mismanagement, or malpractices of the Roman governors of those provinces, they were suffered to retain their arms. The number of Goths who passed the Danube on this occasion was computed at about 200,000 armed men, with their wives and children along with them. Another army of Goths then appeared on the banks of the river, requesting an asylum: this was refused, but they passed without leave, and being ill supplied with provisions, all the Goths united, and commenced a war against the empire; and, after various skirmishes, the Emperor Valens, although his nephew Gratian was on his march to join him, being unwilling to share his glory with another, gave battle to the Goths, in the plains of Adrianople, and was totally defeated. The loss on the side of the Romans was exceeding great, and this defeat was considered as the most severe stroke they had felt since the

battle of Cannæ. The Emperor Valens was never more seen, and was supposed to have been consumed in the flames of a cottage, where he had taken refuge, A. D. 378.

After this dreadful disaster, Theodosius, a native of Spain, was made Emperor of the east, and in four years and a half terminated the Gothic war, in which he displayed consummate abilities and prudence. The Goths had lands assigned them in the Roman provinces, and submitted to the Roman government, but were governed by their own laws, forming an *Imperium in Imperio*. Theodosius was, in every respect, a second Constantine. Like him, he rendered the empire triumphant over all its enemies, extinguished intestine commotions, and established orthodox Christianity upon a solid basis; and finally, in imitation of his example, divided the empire between his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius: assigning to the former the eastern, and to the latter the western part. This was the last and fatal division of the Roman empire; which from that period, is generally distinguished by writers as two separate and independant states; and this seems to have been the leading cause which precipitated its downfall. The two different monarchies into which the Roman empire was now divided, gradually became strangers to each other, and even regarded each other's prosperity with a jealous eye. When the western empire was hard pressed on every side by the northern invaders, the eastern empire seem-

ed quite unmoved by its calamities, and made no effort to avert its impending doom. This alienation appeared more visibly in every successive reign; and after a long train of disasters, of which the melancholy narratives have crowded the ensanguined page of history, Rome, so long the mistress of the world, fell a prey to Gothic plunder, while Constantinople appeared totally unconcerned at the event. Before the imperial city was ransacked by foreign enemies, the western empire had long shewn every symptom of a declining state, yet the immense fabric fell gradually, and, amidst the general dilapidation, it was a considerable time propped by the valour and discipline of the army. The Roman legions gave many checks to the barbarians; but no vigor existed in the administration, and the imperial court, through the impulse of pusillanimity, shut itself up in Ravenna, a place, which impassable marshes on every side rendered inaccessible to an enemy. In that impregnable situation, the shadow of imperial greatness was, during some time, preserved; but the whole empire exhibited a deplorable scene of anarchy and disaster, one province after another, falling a prey to the northern invaders, who poured by innumerable swarms into the empire, and whose numbers defeat and slaughter never seemed to diminish.

While the pageantry of state was, in some degree, kept up at Ravenna, and the imperial court, in that inaccessible situation, surrounded by vast morasses, consulted its own security,

the rest of Italy was ravaged by the enemies of the empire. Alaric, the Gothic chief, having made peace with the eastern empire, on condition of being constituted master-general of the eastern Illyrium, was immediately proclaimed king of the Visigoths, A. D. 398, and two years after invaded Italy; but was defeated at Pollentia, by Stilicho, the Roman general. Italy was next invaded by Rhadagasius, another northern chief, who laid siege to Florence, and threatened Rome itself. This invader was also defeated and slain by Stilicho, and his whole army exterminated, A. D. 406. Thus the remains of Roman discipline, while any energy was left in the government to call it into action, proved an overmatch in the field for the numerous hosts of the barbarians. But it seemed that the imperial court rushed upon its own destruction. Stilicho was supplanted at the court of Honorius, and treacherously slain, A. D. 408. Thus fell that great general, whose military achievements rivalled those of the greatest heroes, Rome, in her most brilliant ages of martial glory, had ever produced, and who had long been the chief prop of the tottering empire, and the guardian angel of the imperial city. Alaric immediately renewed the war, and laid siege to Rome. For that time, however, he accepted a ransom, and retired, receiving 5000 pounds weight of gold, 30,000 pounds weight of silver, 3000 pieces of scarlet cloth, 4000 robes of silk, (which, in that age, were of an immense value,

silk being then reckoned equivalent to its weight of gold), and 3000 pounds of pepper, which was at that time valued at 15 denarii, or ten shillings sterling per pound. Alaric, however, under what pretext is not known, returned the next year to the siege, but again retired. He afterwards besieged Rome a third time, and at last took and plundered the city; carrying away the immense wealth which had been accumulated within its walls by so long a series of successful war. Thus imperial Rome, which had employed so many centuries in plundering the nations, and had so long reigned the domineering mistress of the world, was taken, and plundered by the Goths, A. D. 410, about eleven hundred and fifty-two years after its foundation. Alaric soon after died, in the vigor of his age, and his brother, Adolphus, being elected king of the Goths, concluded a peace with the empire; and having evacuated Italy, and married Placidia, sister of the Emperor Honorius, marched into Gaul, where he founded the Gothic kingdom of Toulouse, which comprised the provinces situated between the Loire and the Garonne, and was afterwards annexed to the kingdom of France, by Clovis, the first Christian king of that country.

A gleam of tranquillity now seemed to shine on the declining empire; but its overthrow was written in the volume of Divine Providence. Its great Gothic adversary was now converted into a friend and ally, but hosts of enemies now

poured in. The period of time included, between A. D. 435, and A. D. 453, was marked by the sanguinary reign of Attila, king of the Huns. This butcher of the human race, every where spread horror and desolation. He attacked the eastern empire, and ravaged its provinces, to the very gates of Constantinople, A. D. 441. After making peace with that empire, he invaded Gaul, and laid siege to Orleans. The plains of Chalons, in Champagne, are rendered famous by the most dreadful and destructive conflict recorded in history, where the king of the Huns received a signal defeat by a confederate Roman and Gothic army, commanded by the Roman general Ætius, and Theodoric, king of the Gothic kingdom of Thoulouse. Historians, although they differ in their statements of particulars, all agree in representing this battle as the most horrible scene of butchery ever displayed on the military theatre of the world. The lowest calculation makes the loss on the side of the Huns, amount to 130,000; but most historians state it at a much greater number. The restless Attila, whose title of the scourge of the Almighty was perfectly appropriate to his character, notwithstanding this bloody defeat and loss, soon after invaded Italy, and extended his ravages to the very gates of Rome. He died within about a year afterwards, in the full strength and vigor of his age, by the breaking of a blood-vessel, A. D. 453. Thus the world was delivered from one of the most sanguinary

destroyers of mankind that ever disgraced the page of history.' It is now impossible to determine the limits of Attila's kingdom; but it is supposed that he had united the greatest part of Germany and Poland, as well as Hungary and ancient Dacia, under his dominions. It appears, however, that his empire had fallen asunder after his death, as none of his successors have made any figure in history.

In these disastrous times, the crimes, as well as the misfortunes of the Romans, seemed to exceed all bounds. The Emperor, Valentinian the Third, stabbed with his own hand the Patrician Ætius, the last support of the empire, to whom it owed the prolongation of its existence. Valentinian was himself assassinated at a review, about a year after he had committed this rash crime. He was the last of the race of the great Theodosius. Ætius had broken the formidable power of Attila, in the memorable conflict on the plains of Châlons; but the enemies of Rome were not extirpated by that defeat, nor by the subsequent death of that destroyer. Genseric, king of the Vandals, took and plundered Rome, A. D. 455. From the death of Valentinian the Third A. D. 455, to A. D. 476, the empire still dragged on a lingering existence, under nine successive Emperors, until Odoacer, chief of the Heruli, sat down on the throne of the Cæsars, and put a final period to the existence of the western empire.

If we peruse with attention the histories of these calamitous times, and examine the com-

plicated tissue of circumstances which occasioned the subversion of the most extraordinary and wonderful political structure the world has ever seen, we shall find, that a variety of causes concurred to produce this great effect. The luxury of the Romans, and the despotism of the imperial government, might break the martial spirit of the people, and render them less fit for military achievements. This is more than a bare supposition; it evidently appears actually to have been the case. During the latter ages of Rome, reckoning from the reign of Commodus, the strength of the empire had been often exhausted, and much of its best blood spilt, in fruitless contests among its rulers. These causes, undoubtedly, contributed to effect the downfall of the empire; and a variety of other causes, too numerous to examine in detail, and some of them, perhaps, at this time totally unknown, or at least difficult to investigate, undoubtedly entered into the combination. The division of the empire into two separate states, however, appears to have been the principal internal cause of its dissolution. Perhaps, however, no system of politics, no military discipline or courage, could have prevented the destruction of the Colossal fabric. An external cause existed, which would, perhaps, in process of time, have surmounted every obstacle, and overcome all opposition. The nations of the north had, ever since the time of Marius, been formidable enemies to Rome. At that pe-

rior to the republic⁴ had, with the Cimbri, one of the most dangerous wars in which it was ever engaged, and which was not terminated without an incredible slaughter of the enemy. During the prosperous times of the empire, the Roman name was a restraint on their daring and enterprising spirits; but on every favorable opportunity they recommenced their predatory inroads into the frontier provinces; and although in every war they were repulsed⁵ with great loss of men, they incessantly renewed their incursions. Those nations, leading a simple and hardy⁶ life, ignorant of the arts of civilization, which contribute to the support of numerous communities; little acquainted with agriculture, and yet less with commerce and manufactures, found themselves unfavorably situated for subsistence, and their increasing numbers straitened in the frozen regions of the north; and being actuated by a roving inclination, and a restless spirit of enterprize, they were always ready to emigrate towards the fertile regions and genial climates of the more southern parts of the globe. But the dominions of Rome extending from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, every where presented an insurmountable barrier to their progress, and confined them to the countries on the north of the Rhine, the Danube, and the Euxine sea. By the physical laws of the increase of the human species, those nations must have multiplied very fast: and, in their uncivilized state, must, in process of time, have been

necessitated to open some passage for the discharge of their superfluous numbers. This has always been the case in all uncivilized nations; and from the earliest periods of antiquity, history furnishes successive instances of the migrations of the northern nations towards the temperate climates of the south. In every country the soil can provide subsistence for only a limited number of inhabitants, and this number may be reckoned greater or less, in proportion to its natural fertility in conjunction with the temperature of the climate, and the perfection of agriculture. Whenever the population is increased beyond this fixed point, a part of the inhabitants must emigrate, unless some other method of supporting the superabundant population can be discovered; and this can only be done by manufactures and commerce. The manufacturing system is a great source and support of population, as the different articles are exported to such countries as want them, and the overplus produce of those countries imported for the support of the manufacturer.

In civilized countries we find manufactures are an inexhaustible source of wealth, by which they are enabled to draw from other countries that subsistence which their own does not supply. We see this exemplified in Holland, and many other parts; and, indeed, in all commercial and manufacturing countries, and large towns, where a great number of people are crowded within a narrow space, where nothing

for sustenance is produced, and yet every thing is found plentiful. The open country, being well cultivated by industrious husbandmen, produces more than is sufficient for the subsistence of the cultivators; and the inhabitants of populous towns, collecting by traffic, or fabricating by their ingenuity and industry, such things as the peasant has need of, draw their subsistence from the overplus produce of the open country, exhibiting a picture in miniature of the traffic carried on between commercial countries; by which the wants of one are supplied out of the superfluities of another. But uncivilized nations have not these resources, and consequently, when their population increases beyond a certain point, they must have recourse to emigration. From these considerations it appears, that the northern nations must, sooner or later, have broken in upon, and overturned the Russian empire; which, by the immense extent of its frontier, every where presented an obstacle to their progress. This must have happened, unless those nations had adopted the arts of civilized society; or else their superfluous numbers must have been successively cut off in wars with the Romans. The physical and moral circumstances of the case admitted no other alternative. The vast countries extending northward, from the Rhine, the Danube, and the Euxine, comprehending Germany, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, formed an immense nursery for the human species. The more

northern nations moving southward, and overwhelming the more southern tribes, resembled a vast deluge, wave impelling wave in continual succession, until the great mass of barbarians was accumulated upon the Roman frontier, as we have seen in the case of the Goths and the Huns, in the reign of the Emperor Valens. During the latter ages of the empire, those invasions had followed one another in almost continual succession. We have seen, that in the reign of Gallienus, the empire seemed to be verging towards its dissolution. It was, at that time, preserved from destruction by the consummate abilities, and vigorous efforts of those warlike Emperors Claudius, Probus, and Aurelian; and its greatness maintained, with difficulty, by Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and others. Constantine had restored it to the highest pitch of its former power and grandeur, and his great military fame, with the real or apparent energy of his government, restrained the attempts of all the enemies of Rome. But in the short reign of Valentinian and Valens, the Goths, and other nations of the north, renewed their invasions; and, during the space of almost a whole century, scarcely ever ceased from attacking the empire in every point, the whole length of the northern frontier, from the mouth of the Rhine to that of the Danube. The eastern empire firmly maintaining itself against their attempts, they almost all turned their arms against the west, until the Roman power sunk under their reiterated at-

tacks, and the impèrial city itself fell a prey to the invaders. To have maintained the Roman empire against such swarms of enemies, it ought to have remained undivided, and the Emperor should always have been a Claudius, or a Probus, an Aurelian, or a Constantine.

We have observed the wealth, the luxury, and splendor, and endeavoured to estimate the extent and population of Rome, while in the zenith of her greatness. Of her state in those unprosperous times of her declining power, it is somewhat difficult to form a conjecture, and whether the imperial city had much declined in opulence and luxury, between the reign of Theodosius the Great and its capture by Alaric, is not easy to determine. It is, however, natural to suppose, that this must have been the case, and that the decline of the metropolis must have accompanied the general decline of the empire. By the loss of its provinces, one after another, and consequently its tributes, not only the empire would suffer a great defalcation of revenue, but the Roman citizens, of whom the poorer sort had been maintained by the tributary donations, must have felt a great deficiency in their supplies. Many of the grandes of Rome would lose their estates in the provinces occupied by the enemy; but yet we do not find that the luxury of that city was much diminished, at least during a considerable time. In a city where the principal wealth of the world had been concentrated, a great derangement might take place in

public affairs, and likewise a great diminution of private opulence, before a luxurious people would display any visible symptoms of poverty. Besides, it is no improbable conjecture, that many of the opulent individuals, in the provinces exposed to the inroads of the enemy, would remove their property, and take refuge in the capital; which, besides the gratification of every desire, held out also a prospect of security; and on that account, a considerable part of the remaining wealth of the empire would be concentrated in the imperial city, which, for that reason, would not, perhaps, exhibit symptoms of decline so early as the provinces. It may, however, without any hazard of forming an erroneous conjecture, be supposed, that Rome must have declined ever after Constantinople was made the seat of government, although it contained 48,802 houses in the reign of Theodosius, sixty years after the removal of the imperial residence. It is reasonable to suppose, that a number of the opulent and ambitious citizens of Rome would, on that occasion, leave the old metropolis, and remove to Constantinople, especially as Constantine held out great inducements, by the grants of estates, and other privileges, to such as fixed their residence in his new capital. If we consider also, that Ravenna, after the imperial court of the western empire had been removed thither, grew a flourishing place, by the afflux of the great and opulent Romans; and that its impassable barrier of morasses held out

a greater prospect of security than the metropolis itself; one cannot hesitate to conclude, that Rome must have exceedingly declined from its former wealth and splendor, before it finally fell a prey to Gothic plunder.

In regard to the general manners of the Romans, we can only observe, that they had exceedingly degenerated under the imperial government. We find still more evident marks of that degeneracy during the period which followed the reign of Constantine. Scarcely any instances of Roman patriotism are to be found in the succeeding reigns, and the public spirit seems to have been extinguished. Want of energy in the government, and luxury, effeminacy, and a general depravity of manners among the people in that age, characterized the Roman empire.

Having delineated a view of the Roman empire, in its declining state, and traced the events which preceded, as well by the causes which produced its downfall, it will not be amiss to defer, to another opportunity, an investigation of the state of religion during the above-mentioned period. I shall, therefore, conclude at present, with subscribing myself,

Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XVII.

SIR,

THE religious history of the Roman empire, after the death of Constantine, merits attention. The state of religion, true or false, is an important subject in the history of the human mind. Every thing must, therefore, be peculiarly interesting that relates to a system, which, to this day, influences the political and moral world, gives a particular direction to our ideas, and forms the basis of our hopes. No sooner was Constantine deposited in the tomb, than his favorite council of Nice began to lose its authority and influence, and Arianism became triumphant. The orthodox party was discountenanced, and almost all the great ecclesiastical dignities throughout the eastern empire, were conferred on the Arians. We have already observed the dangerous situation of Christianity in the reign of Julian, and its providential deliverance from persecution, by the fall of that Emperor in the Persian war. From that period no pagan was ever decorated with the imperial purple; but Valens, the eastern Emperor, adhered strongly to Arianism, and persecuted the orthodox. After the disastrous fate of Valens, at the battle of Adrianople, in the Gothic war, the great Theodosius was elected Emperor of the east. He firmly adhered to the orthodox faith of the trinity, and deprived the Arians of their

ecclesiastical preferments, beside other rigorous proceedings against them; and if he did not extirpate, at least he entirely subdued that heresy; which never more lifted up its head in the empire. This Emperor becoming sole master of the Roman world, abolished idol worship in every part of the empire; and, in his reign, the Roman senate embraced Christianity, A. D. 388.

During a period of forty years which had elapsed from the death of Constantine to the triumph of orthodoxy under Theodosius, Constantinople had been the seat of Arianism; and the faith of the emperors, the prelates, and the people of that metropolis, was rejected in the theological schools of Rome and Alexandria. The celebrated Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, from whom the Athanasian creed takes its name, was the strenuous assertor of the Catholic doctrine of the trinity, and suffered many persecutions on that account. Religious controversy was the grand object of attention, and the prevailing taste among the lazy multitude of Constantinople; and not only the mechanics, but even the very slaves, were all profound theologians, and pretended to investigate the mystery of the trinity, and the incomprehensible nature of the Supreme and Eternal Being. The history of the church, during this period, exhibits a disgusting scene of faction, persecution, and anarchy; bishop condemning bishop, and synod condemning synod, with all the virulence of pride and fanaticism.

The elevation of Gregory Nazianzen to the archiepiscopal see of Constantinople, A. D. 380, marked the triumph of the orthodox party. The Emperor Theodosius himself conducted Gregory through the streets, and placed him on the archiepiscopal throne, and the Arians were expelled from the churches by military force. As soon as the archbishop began to preach the doctrine of the trinity, and the divinity of Christ, a motley band of monks and vagabonds assaulted the church, and were not, without difficulty, compelled to retire. Theodosius, in order to cut off all pretext for dispute or doubt, concerning those profound questions of the nature of the Divine Persons of the trinity, assembled at Constantinople a council of one hundred and fifty bishops, in which the theological system of the council of Nice was illustrated and explained; and the divinity of the Holy Ghost, concerning which some doubts had arisen, was established as an essential article in the creed of the Christian church. This council of Constantinople ranks as the second general council, and completely established and explained the orthodox faith of the trinity. In the reign of Theodosius, and that of Arcadius, his son, several great characters flourished in the Christian church, particularly Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom, both of them successively archbishops of Constantinople. The corruption of language is visible in most of the Latin fathers of that age; but the composition of Gregory Nazian-

zen and Chrysostom are deemed equal to the most elegant models of attic eloquence; Chrysostom especially has always been esteemed the most elegant writer, as he certainly was the most eloquent preacher of all the primitive fathers. He was originally a priest of Antioch, and after he was made archbishop of Constantinople he was persecuted and driven into exile by the Empress Eudoxia, A. D. 404; not without an insurrection of the people in his favor, which he, notwithstanding, disapproved, and with difficulty dispersed. This great man died in exile, A. D. 407, and his relics were, with great solemnity, translated to Constantinople by the Emperor, Theodosius the Second, A. D. 438.

After the reign of Theodosius the Great had effected the depression of Arianism, the orthodox faith of the trinity continued to be the creed of the whole Roman empire. The Goths, and several other nations bordering on the Roman empire, had already been wholly, or in part, converted to the Christian faith; but as they had received their religion principally from the Arians, who had been expelled by the orthodox party, in the reign of Constantine, or by the missionaries of Constantinople, during the reigns of the Arian Emperors, his successors, the religion they had embraced was Arianism. In consequence of the persecution of the Arians, under Theodosius, and the expulsion of the bishops, and other clergy, who refused to subscribe the

articles of faith dictated by the councils of Nice and Constantinople, a great number of those churchmen took refuge among the Gothic nations, where their doctrines were looked upon as the true creed of the Christian church. These expelled ecclesiastics were well received among the barbarous nations, revered as sufferers in the cause of religion, and met with extraordinary success in the propagation of their doctrines; so that Arian Christianity became the religion of all the northern nations, who were converted before the subversion of the Roman empire. Thus omitting the different sects, which, from time to time, made their appearance in the church, and have been stigmatized with the name of heresies, it may suffice to remark, that the Christian world was divided into two great parties, the orthodox and the Arians; the one asserting the divinity of Christ, with the co-equality and co-essentiality of the Divine Persons of the trinity; and the other teaching the subordination of the Son, and the essential superiority of the Father. The former was the creed of the western, and the latter that of the eastern empire, from the reign of Constantine to that of Theodosius; and after that period the Catholic doctrine of the trinity was the faith of the whole Roman world, and Arianism the religion of all the other nations which had embraced Christianity; until after the subversion of the empire, when they begun one after another, to embrace the Roman religion, and adopt

the doctrine of the trinity, in conformity to the decrees of the councils of Nice and Constantinople.

In the ages of which we are now speaking, an order of men arose, who have made a conspicuous figure on the political, as well as the religious theatre of the world, and whose notions of serving the Deity form a distinguished and striking feature in the history of the human mind. In that tremendous period of persecution, which commenced in the joint reign of Diocletian and Maximian, a new mode of professing the Christian religion, and of practising its precepts, began to take place in the church. Anthony and Paul, two Egyptian hermits, had some time before sequestered themselves from the world, and devoted their lives to contemplation and prayer in the deserts of Thebais. Several others, either desirous of avoiding the horrors of persecution, or of shunning the snares of a sinful world, or, perhaps, through a natural inclination for a contemplative life, retired to the deserts, separating themselves from the society of men, in order to enjoy an uninterrupted communication of the Deity. Anthony collected a number of those, and united them in regular societies, about A. D. 305. A great number of persons, of a pious and contemplative turn of mind, embraced this way of life, and some of them adopted exceedingly strict and rigorous rules, believing a life of voluntary mortification to be an acceptable homage to the Supreme Being.

To trace the origin, or examine the rules and institutions of the various religious orders, which were, at different periods, established in the church, would far exceed the limits appropriated to a general view of the history of mankind. It suffices to observe, that in the reign of Constantine and his successors, the ascetic life grew into a prevailing mode, and monasteries were established by Hilarion, in Palestine, about A. D. 328; at Rome, A. D. 341; by Basil, in Pontus, A. D. 360; by Martin, in Gaul, A. D. 370; and, after a short time, in all parts of the Christian world. These religious, by their real or apparent sanctity, soon grew into great repute. They were drawn from their solitudes, introduced into large cities and towns, and had superb monasteries founded for their abode, with magnificent churches erected for the celebration of divine service. In process of time, piety, or superstition, endowed those foundations with great revenues and possessions. Thus those pious devotees, who had renounced the world, and made a vow of poverty, became masters of vast possessions; and although individually poor, possessing all things in common, they formed wealthy communities.

In speaking of a class of religious persons, which makes a distinguished figure in history, it may not, perhaps, be deemed unpardonable to outrun the order of time, and to anticipate some remarks, which, although they might be postponed to another period, yet, for the sake of

uniformity in the subject, can be no where better placed than here. It is not difficult to perceive, that how great soever might be the veneration in which the monastic life was held some centuries ago, it is not much adapted to the taste of modern times. Those nations which have embraced the reformed religion, have entirely rejected all monkish institutions. In the Roman Catholic countries they are much less respected than formerly. In most of those countries their number is considerably diminished. In France they are totally abolished; and, if we may hazard a conjecture from existing appearances, there will scarcely be a single monastery found remaining in any country of the Roman Catholic communion, at the end of the present century: nor is there much room to doubt of their abolition, in process of time, among those of the Greek church, which, in this particular, will probably follow the example of that of Rome. In regard to the merits of these institutions, many reasons are alledged against their propriety, some founded on good grounds and others on erroneous principles and misrepresentations. A candid enquirer will, however, examine and judge impartially, without passion or prejudice, and endeavour to view things, not through the medium of party spirit, but in their true light and native colours.

In order to investigate the propriety of monastic institutions, we must consider them both in a religious and a political point of view, as

they regard the worship of the Almighty, and as they are connected with the interests of society. In regard to the religious worship of the Supreme Being, monastic institutions seem to be wholly a matter of indifference. That infinite Being, who pervades the universe, and fills immensity with his presence, may be worshipped in all places, and in every situation, within the walls of a monastery, or amidst the crowd of a city, in the tumult of a camp, or amidst the splendor of a court. Neither the retirement of the cloister, nor the bustle of the crowd, can facilitate or impede his acceptation of the sincere homage of his creatures. If, therefore, a company of persons can agree to associate themselves together, in order to employ their time in contemplation and prayer, under such rules and regulations as they think appropriate to such a situation, and conducive to their mutual convenience, such associations cannot, on any principle of religion, be condemnable, any more than literary or other societies; but they are not, in any respect essential to religion, and, perhaps, very little conducive to its general interests.

Monastic institutions, when impartially considered, without any bias of party prejudice, appearing a matter of total indifference in regard to religion, it remains to examine how far they may appear, in a political view, conducive to the benefit of society, or detrimental to its interests, which must, in a great measure, depend on the

different circumstances of different ages and countries.

Religious houses have often been represented as the asylums of indolence, and the monks as persons leading a life useless to society. This argument is plausible in appearance, but fallacious in fact, because founded on a representation, which, being understood as universal, is erroneous. Admitting, however, the representation to be true, as it certainly is, in part, we must likewise observe, that religious houses are not the only asylums of laziness in a state. How many such asylums are there not found in private families? The crowds of domestics composing the retinues of the great and opulent, in every country, are of little service to the public, except by contributing to the general consumption of the produce, and thereby helping to give activity to industry and commerce; and the monks contribute, in the same manner, to stimulate the activity of society. In every country, and under every political system, there are great numbers of individuals who do not employ themselves in any useful labour. Every man is not obliged to labour. Those who have property and possessions sufficient to support them, and even to enable them to live in an elegant manner, will seldom employ themselves in cultivating the lands, or confine themselves to the manufacturing loom, for the sake of applying their labours beneficial to the public.

From this principle of reasoning, which uniform experience shews to be just, it is evident, that if the lands annexed to the monasteries did not maintain lazy monks, they would maintain lazy laymen. But the monastic possessions cannot, any more than the estates of lay proprietors, be cultivated without labour; and consequently they must, like all other lands, support industrious husbandmen, as well as lazy monks. Mankind are too prone to be carried away by first thoughts, without stopping to make serious reflections. If we were certain that every person in these religious houses would, if he was abroad in the world, employ himself in something beneficial to the public, it would be well if no such places existed; but this is very far from being certain. In every country there are numbers of persons, whose time and talents are still less usefully employed than those of the monks. It is supposed, that before the revolution, the number of religious, of both sexes, in the convents of France, was not less than two hundred thousand. All these were unemployed in any thing useful to the state; but, at the same time, there were, perhaps, twice as many persons in that country as useless to society as they, and much less inoffensive. The number of religious houses, in France, was certainly very great; but if many more Frenchmen had been employed some years ago, in contemplation and prayer, it would, perhaps, have been no worse, either for themselves or for Europe. In England itself there are,

undoubtedly, many thousands of persons who would be better employed in a *convent* than they employ themselves.

The general representation of the monks, as an indolent and useless class of people, is a false delineation of character. That many of them are persons of that description is not to be doubted: but others of them are to be ranked in a very different class. The monks not only were the preservers of learning, amidst the barbarism of the Gothic ages, but many of them have been great promoters of modern science, and actively instrumental in the revival of learning, and in dispelling the gloom of barbaric ignorance, which, during so many centuries, enveloped the powers of the human intellect. Had not the monks collected and preserved what remained of the universal wreck of literature, all ancient learning would have been irretrievably lost, and the history of ancient times forgotten. We should have wanted the compositions of the poets and orators of Greece and Rome, those noble specimens of genius and eloquence, which we so much admire, had they not been preserved and transmitted to us by the monks; who, on this account, are to be regarded as benefactors to mankind, and considered as an order of men possessing a claim to the gratitude of posterity.

The disorders prevalent in many religious houses have been exhibited by some writers in the darkest colours: yet we have incontestible

historical authority to prove, that some of the monks were pious as well as learned; and, in in both these respects, ornaments to the age in which they lived, and to human nature. That many of them have been otherwise is equally unquestionable. This is the case in all communities of men. A military corps is not to be condemned, because there may happen to be some cowards in it; nor the morals of a whole nation impeached; because some malefactors die by the hand of the executioner. That all the monks were pious, or that all the nuns were chaste, reason forbids us to believe; but it would be equally unreasonable and uncharitable, to suppose that they were all impious and unchaste. Prejudice ought not so far to influence our judgment, as to induce us to implicate a whole community in the criminality of some of its members: and sound reasoning ought not to be led astray by the false colouring of misrepresentation. We ought, in all cases, to judge impartially, and examine both sides of the question, before we give unqualified approbation, or proceed to an indiscriminate censure of our fellow-mortals, of what sect, party, or denomination soever they may happen to be. Upon the whole, it appears that monastic institutions, not being founded upon any divine precept, constitute no part of religion, and consequently can only be regarded merely as human institutions; and that, like other political and civil establishments, their propriety and merit ought to be

estimated according to their adaptation to human circumstances, in different ages and countries. Viewing them in this light, they might be well adapted to the circumstances of the times in which they flourished most ; but they certainly are not so to the circumstances of modern times. During the Gothic, and those called the middle ages, when the whole Christian world, or at least that part of it which constituted the western, or Latin church, was involved in barbarism and unlettered ignorance, and agitated with perpetual commotions ; when the incessant alarms of war, and the general military state of Europe deprived its inhabitants of the leisure, as well as the inclination, to cultivate the sciences, and addict themselves to those studies which enlighten and embellish the human mind ; when such were the circumstances of the Christian countries, it seems to have been highly proper that an order of men, separated from the bustle of the world, and secured by the public veneration from the apprehension of violence, were left at leisure to attend to the improvement of the human intellect, to preserve the remains of ancient learning, and to instruct the ignorant multitude. The secular clergy were too much embroiled in the commotions of those turbulent and unsettled times, to turn their attention to literature and the sciences ; and hardly any thing could have been better calculated for that purpose, in such times, than monastic institutions ; but as such times no longer exist, those esta-

blishments are now of no utility, and very probably, will soon be universally abolished.

With this general view of the religious aspect of the Christian world, as it exhibited itself during the period which elapsed between the death of Constantine and the subversion of the western empire, I shall conclude, by assuring you, that with unfeigned respect,

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

SIR,

IN compliance with your desire I again present to you a train of observations and reflections which will give you but little pleasure : for not many reflections of an agreeable kind can arise from the period which now offers itself to our contemplation. After the subversion of the Roman empire a gloomy period succeeds, which seems to form a vast chasm in the history of the human mind. From that memorable epoch to the reign of Charlemagne, the annals of Europe, during a period of more than three centuries, displays a continued scene of bloodshed and anarchy. The pages of history recount nothing else, during this dark and calamitous period, but the incessant and bloody revolutions which took place in the kingdoms and states which the northern nations had formed out of the ruins of the Roman empire ; and the writers, who treat of those times, crowd their narratives with

ill-authenticated details of battles, sieges, treasons, and assassinations, which are not worth the attention of posterity, any further than as they serve to exhibit a general view of the formation of the kingdoms and states of modern Europe. The Goths had established their kingdom in Spain, about A. D. 472; and Clovis established the French monarchy about the end of the fifth century. The Saxons had entered into England so early as A. D. 449; and the sixth century is distinguished by the establishment of the Saxon heptarchy in this country; the conquest of Burgundy and Aquitain by the French, and the complete establishment of the French monarchy. The kingdom of Idacer, in Italy, was conquered by Theodoric, king of the Goths, who was subsidized and commissioned by the court of Constantinople, and reigned king of Italy under the sanction and authority of the eastern Emperor, to whom he acknowledged himself a vassal. Theodoric is represented as a prince of great political virtues, but so ignorant of letters, that he could not sign his name. Italy, however, flourished under his reign: he preserved the Goths and Italians, as two distinct nations, reserving the former for the employments of war, and the latter for those of peace. On the death of Theodoric his kingdom devolved upon his beautiful and accomplished daughter, Amalasontha, whose exile and death happened A. D. 535.

Theodoric had reigned under the sanction of

the imperial court of Constantinople, and although king of Italy, had always acknowledged himself the ally and dependant of the eastern empire; but after the exile and death of his daughter, the Goths of Italy refused to acknowledge the paramount authority of the imperial court, and renounced all dependence on, and connection with, the empire. Justinian then reigned over the east, and dispatched his general, Belisarius, into Italy. Belisarius entered Rome, where he was besieged by the Goths. His gallant and almost incredible defence of the city, with only 5000 veterans, against a numerous army of Goths, commanded by Vitiges, their king, during the space of a whole year, A. D. 537, is deemed one of the most signal military exploits recorded in history; although it may not be unreasonable to suppose, that our account of it is somewhat exaggerated, as it is related by Procopius, an author partial to the interests and the fame of Belisarius. The military achievements of that great general are, however, sufficiently authenticated to immortalize his name. Belisarius made many daring and successful sallies out of Rome, and the Goths are said to have lost 80,000 men in one general assault. They were obliged to raise the siege on the arrival of fresh troops from Constantinople. Belisarius at length subdued the Gothic kingdom of Italy. Vitiges, their king, surrendering on conditions, was sent to Constantinople, and Justinian assigned him for his mainte-

nance a rich estate in Asia Minor; and, on his conforming to the Athanasian creed, conferred on him the rank of patrician and senator, which still continued as honorary titles in the empire. Gulimer, king of the Vandals, had also an ample estate assigned him, but could not enjoy any honorary title, that being incompatible with his professing Arianism. The Goths again revolted under the command of Tetila, whom they had elected king, on which Belisarius, a second time, entered Italy, Rome was taken by the Goths, A. D. 546, and retaken by Belisarius, A. D. 547. Belisarius being recalled, Rome was again captured by the enemy. The command of the army of Italy then was conferred on Narses, the eunuch, a person of consummate military skill, and the most daring courage. This general defeated and slew Tetila, the Gothic king, and made himself master of Rome, A. D. 552. He also defeated and slew Teias, who had succeeded Tetila, as king of the Goths, A. D. 552. Immediately after followed a formidable invasion of Italy, by the Franks and Alemanni, whose vast armies poured in like a deluge; but those invaders were defeated by Narses, with prodigious slaughter, A. D. 554. Italy was then made a province of the eastern or Byzantine empire, and a government established under the denomination of the exarchate, of which the eunuch Narses, who had distinguished himself by the most signal display of military talents and dauntless courage, was the first exarch. The long

and bloody series of reiterated invasions and repulses, of plunder, devastation, and carnage, which, from the reign of Honorius, in the west, to that of Justinian, in the east, during a space of nearly a hundred and fifty years, desolated Italy, and fill the volumes of the historians of that calamitous period, would rather deserve to be buried in eternal oblivion, than to be recalled to the remembrance of after-ages, did not a cursory view of them contribute to shew the gradual downfall of the Roman empire, with the scenes of war and slaughter which took place, before the northern nations could establish their dominion on the ruins of that colossal power. The history of these times, however, among all its disgusting scenes, exhibits some great and extraordinary characters, which merit a place in the memory of posterity; particularly the Emperor Justinian, and his celebrated generals, Belisarius and Narses. Fortune seems to have singled out Justinian in an extraordinary manner, as the object of her favors. He owed his elevation to his uncle Justin, who was born of an obscure family of peasants in Dacia, on the north side of the Danube, and, with two other peasants of the same village, deserting the profession of husbandry, with a scanty provision of biscuit in their sacks, travelled to Constantinople, to try their fortune in that capital, which was then the central point of human action, and the most conspicuous theatre for the display of every kind of talents. There is not, perhaps,

in the history of mankind, any thing more agreeable, or more striking, than the exhibition of extraordinary characters, and the display of those singular vicissitudes which have marked the lives of some extraordinary personages who seem to have been selected by the Divine Providence to act a distinguished part on the great theatre of the world. Justin, on his arrival at Constantinople, was, by reason of his strength and stature, received into the body guards of the Emperor Leo. Under the two succeeding reigns, Justin emerged from poverty and obscurity to wealth and promotion. Having distinguished himself in the war against the Persians, his merit advanced him to the successive ranks of military preferment. He was at last dignified with the title of Senator, and obtained the command of the imperial guards. Being in this favorable situation, at the death of the Emperor Anastasius he seized that opportunity of raising himself to the sovereignty of the eastern empire; and, by means of his advantageous post, and his influence over the soldiery, seated himself on the imperial throne, at the advanced age of sixty eight. Justin, like Theodoric, king of Italy, was totally illiterate; and it may be regarded as a circumstance somewhat singular, that two of the most powerful contemporary monarchs in the world, were wholly ignorant of letters: Justin's nephew, Justinian, from the same village, and in the same obscure employment in which himself had been bred. Thus

was that fortunate youth drawn out of rustic obscurity, and acknowledged as presumptive heir of the eastern empire. He received an excellent literary education at Constantinople, and, with every advantage in his favor, ascended the imperial throne on the death of his uncle, A. D. 527. By the conquest of Italy and Africa, he gave to the eastern, or Byzantine empire, an aggrandizement and extension, which it had never before possessed, since its separation from the western empire; and distinguished himself by the display of consummate political and legislative abilities, during a long reign of thirty-eight, and a life of eighty three years; exhibiting, every circumstance considered, the most extraordinary instance of long continued personal prosperity, that is, perhaps, any where to be met with in history. Several of the Roman Emperors, as Claudius, Probus, Aurelianus, Diocletian, Maximin, Galerius, and others, had risen from the most obscure condition to the empire of the world; but their elevation had been the hard-earned reward of merit, and sometimes the consequence of their crimes. Those Emperors had spent the flower of their age in the hardships and dangers of a military life; some of them, during a long time, in subordinate situations, without ever having had an opportunity of obtaining an education suitable to the exalted station to which they were afterwards raised. The same observations may be made in regard to some other Emperors of the east, after

Justinian, and particularly Basil, the Macedonian. We have also, in the last century, seen Nadir Shah, commonly called Kouli Khan, from a captain of robbers, become the sovereign of Persia, the conqueror of the Mogul empire, and the domineering rival of the Ottoman power. None of the successful adventurers here mentioned had the advantages of a liberal education, a prosperous life, and a glorious reign, like Justinian. He found every advantage thrown in his way, in early youth, without the labour of acquisition; and, without exertion, hazard, or criminality, was advanced from the lowest state of obscurity, to the most exalted station of human greatness, which he held with distinguished splendor and reputation, during the course of a very long life. The hard-earned and short-lived glory of other Emperors, who, like him, had risen from obscurity, followed military merit, displayed in a life of hardships and danger; but the good fortune of Justinian rushed upon him before he had distinguished himself by the exertion of his abilities, and only served to display his great talents to the view of the world. To render Justinian a complete pattern of human felicity, nature had endowed him with an excellent genius, a sound and vigorous understanding, a robust constitution, and almost uninterrupted health. There are some writers, who, in delineating Justinian's public and private character, endeavour obliquely to diminish his reputation in the eyes of posterity. This is frequently at-

tempted by the enemies of Christianity, with whom he is not a favorite character; as he not only distinguished his piety and zeal for religion, in building the superb cathedral of St. Sophia, but also, in being the strenuous assertor of the doctrines of the church against all such opinions as were stigmatized with the name of heresies. It appears, indeed, that bigotry was the greatest and almost the only blemish in Justinian's character; and from that he certainly was not free, as he gave himself no small trouble in the vain attempt to bring all men to be of one opinion, in regard to religion. The most partial enemies of his fame acknowledge his merit as a philosopher, a politician, and a legislator; as well as his acquaintance with literature and the arts. He has left a noble monument of his legislative abilities in his code of laws, which is esteemed the foundation of the civil jurisprudence of modern Europe, although variously modified, according to the exigencies of various circumstances. The magnificent cathedral of St. Sophia, now a Mahometan mosque, of which he himself was one of the principal architects, remains a no less noble monument of his skill in architecture. His acquisition of knowledge was the effect of steady application in the exertion of a powerful genius. He was abstemious in his diet, and still more so in the measures of his sleep. After the repose of a single hour he frequently arose, and studied until the morning. With an excellent genius,

seconded by such intense application, and such restless activity of mind, joined to a vigorous constitution, and uninterrupted health, during the course of so long a life, it is not surprising that Justinian's intellectual attainments were very considerable. His political talents were manifested in the manner in which he conducted his wars, and in his choice of commanders, by whose consummate abilities and successful exertions, the Gothic and Vandalic kingdoms of Italy and Africa were annexed to the eastern or Byzantine empire, which, after the acquisition of those countries, wanted only Spain, France, and Britain, to give it the full extent of the undivided Roman empire, when in the zenith of its greatness.

Belisarius and Narses are characters scarcely less remarkable, or less distinguished in history, than their master Justinian: They were both of them of an obscure original, and brought up to mean employments. Both of them were advanced to great preferment, and signalized themselves by their courage and conduct, in the most trying situations, exhibiting an incontestible proof of Justinian's discernment in discovering so much merit in such an inferior station. The world has long been amused with a ridiculous tale of Belisarius having been deprived of sight, and, in consequence of the confiscation of his property, reduced to the necessity of asking alms in the street. The whole transaction from which that fiction arose, is, that Belisarius hav-

ing been accused of a conspiracy against the Emperor, was imprisoned; but being found innocent, was in consequence liberated; although Justinian seized the greatest part of his immense property. It is surprising that historians should delight in imposing ridiculous fictions upon the credulity of their readers.

In the reign of Justinian, the eastern empire, although in the meridian of its glory, experienced, together with the greatest part of the world, calamities of a physical nature, which it was out of the reach of human prudence to prevent. Tremendous earthquakes happened almost every year throughout the whole extent of the empire; but this reign is still more fatally remarkable, on account of a dreadful pestilence which is said to have made its first appearance in the neighbourhood of Pelasium, in Egypt, a city on the easternmost branch of the Nile. This dreadful contagion spread over the greatest parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and scarcely any place escaped the infection. During the space of three months, from five to ten thousand died daily in Constantinople; many cities in the east were almost depopulated; and in some parts of Italy the harvest and vintage rotted on the ground. This pestilence broke out in the fifteenth year of Justinian's reign, and was of such continuance, that the contagion was not extinguished in less than fifty-two years; so long was the duration of this calamitous period in the physical circumstances of the human species.

The subjugation of Italy and Africa was an event which, although it increased the power and added greatly to the extent of Justinian's empire, has had a much less decided influence on the condition of succeeding ages than an enterprise of a commercial nature, of which this reign forms the important era. The effects of the former were soon obliterated, those of the latter have been permanent; they have survived the empire, and are still felt in modern Europe. Ever since the period when Rome, having attained to the zenith of her power and greatness, began to dissipate by her luxury the riches she had acquired by her arms, silk was one of those articles of extravagant expence which contributed more, perhaps, than any other, to carry off towards the oriental parts of Asia, the wealth that she had amassed by the plunder of all the countries between the Euphrates and the Pillars of Hercules. This had long constituted a very considerable part of the traffic carried on between Rome and India, by the port of Alexandria, during the most flourishing period of the empire. In later times, when the imperial city had fallen a prey to the northern nations, and the eastern empire been for some time feeble and languishing, the Persians had, by various means, often intercepted the communication between the east and the west, and had, in some degree, monopolized the silk trade. Usbec Tartary, situated almost in the centre of Asia, is a country which, although little known to Euro-

peans, has long been remarkable for the industry and mercantile spirit of its inhabitants, as well as the fertility of its soil. It was here that in later times Zinghis Khan established an empire, which was afterwards revived by Tamerlane, and equalled that of ancient Rome in extent of territory. Here also, at a much earlier period, a traffic was carried on with both the eastern and western countries of Asia. In the time of Justinian, and in the age immediately preceding, the caravans of Samarchand brought silk from China, which was commonly purchased by Persian traders, who frequented the fairs on the frontiers of the two empires, and furnished the Romans with this valuable article of luxury. Although a species of merchandize which, in a small bulk, comprises a great value, might defray the expences of land-carriage, yet the journey of the caravans was long and dangerous, across the immense deserts extending from the Jaxartes to the frontiers of China, in which the wandering hordes have always considered the traveller and the merchant as the objects of lawful rapine. Sometimes, to escape the Tartar robbers, the silk caravans explored a more southern route, and traversing the mountains of Thibet, descended the Indus, and waited in the ports of Guzerat or Malabar, the arrival of the annual fleets from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulph. But the long toil and loss of time in travelling those unfrequented roads, were scarcely less intolerable than the dangers of the desert;

and those who had once made, were seldom inclined to repeat the experiment. The ocean, however, was open for general communication. The Chinese availed themselves of this advantage, and established a navigation to the streights of Malacca; and they might probably extend their route to the isle of Sumatra. From this isle, the direct distance to Ceylon is about 900 miles, and some suppose that they extended thither also their navigation. The Chinese and Indian navigators, directed by the periodical winds, might possibly traverse to this distance the watery expanse: Certain it is, however, that the silk merchants of China, collecting in their voyages also aloes, cloves, nutmegs, and other spices, maintained in the ports of Malacca, or those of the above-mentioned isles, a free and beneficial intercourse with the nations near the Red Sea and the Persian Gulph. The vicinity of the Persians to the markets of India, gave them a decided advantage over the subjects of Justinian, and facilitated the means of monopoly.

Silk had long been an indispensable appendage of luxury, and as it had formerly drained Rome, it now drained Constantinople of its wealth. Immense sums were annually sent out of the empire to the farthest part of the then known world, for the purchase of a foreign manufacture, which employed no citizen or tributary subject; and a great part of the profits arising from so lucrative a commerce, fell into

the hands of the Persians, the inveterate enemies of Constantinople. In whatever manner, indeed, the traffic had been carried on, so copious an importation of so expensive an article from so vast a distance, must have tended to impoverish the empire. Justinian had long desired to turn this lucrative commerce into a Roman channel; but insuperable obstacles prevented the execution of his design. Those difficulties, however, which all the policy of the Emperor could not remove, were surmounted by the enterprising sagacity of two Persian monks, who, in the quality of missionaries, had long resided in China. Amidst their religious occupations, they had viewed with an investigating eye the manufacturers of silk in that country, the myriads of silk-worms, and the mode of their treatment. They discovered that the importation of so delicate and so short-lived an insect, from so great a distance, was impracticable; but they imagined, that in the eggs a numerous progeny might be preserved and propagated. Knowing how agreeable the undertaking would be to the imperial court of Constantinople, they arrived, after a long journey, at that metropolis of the Roman empire; and having imparted their project to the Emperor, were, by the liberality of his gifts, and the splendor of his promises, encouraged to carry it into execution.

The two monks having travelled back to China, and, by concealing the eggs of the silk-worm in a hollow cane, deceived a people ever jealous of

its commerce, returned in triumph to Constantinople, with the spoils of the east, having made a greater conquest than either Justinian or his celebrated general, Belisarius, had ever achieved. Under their direction the eggs were hatched by an artificial heat; the worms were fed with mulberry-leaves; they lived and laboured; and by the use of proper means, the race was propagated and multiplied. Experience and reflection soon corrects the errors incidental to a novel attempt; and in a short time the subjects of Justinian equalled the Chinese in the management of the insects and the manufacture of silk. From Constantinople this valuable insect has been gradually introduced into all the southern parts of Europe; and the material produced by it is now manufactured in almost every country in this quarter of the globe. Thus, in consequence of a singular circumstance in the history of commerce, of which the epoch is assigned to A. D. 552, modern Europe enjoys at an easy expence, one of the most costly luxuries of the ancients, which was formerly peculiar to China, and sold at so enormous a price at Rome.*

While the reign of Justinian constituted the most brilliant period in the history of the Byzantine empire, Europe displayed a striking contrast to the splendid greatness of Constantinople. Italy was deluged with blood by the Gothic wars. The kingdom of France was not completely settled, the Franks, Burgundians,

* Its weight in gold, vide page 313.

&c. in their various contests, rendered France and Germany a scene of carnage and devastation, and England was the theatre of continued wars between the Britons and the Saxons, who established their heptarchy in this country in the reign of Justinian. We have but little information of the manners of those tumultuous ages; but it may, in general terms, be said, that they were barbarous, warlike, and superstitious. The arts and sciences were almost annihilated, and literature almost extinguished by the northern nations, whose taste was entirely for emigration and conquest; and who esteemed the arts of peace and civilization as little worth their notice. The Byzantine empire was the only part of the then known world which could, with propriety, be called civilized; and Constantinople, the centre of all that was great and estimable in literature and the arts. Every study that is calculated for the ornament of the human mind, and the improvement of its faculties, was neglected; and probably, would have been totally forgotten, had not the monks preserved, as much as could be preserved, from the universal wreck of literature.

Soon after the death of Justinian the eastern empire began to decline from that splendor with which it shone in his reign. After the successive reigns of Justin the Second, and of Tiberius, which filled up the interval from the death of Justinian, which happened A. D. 565, to the accession of Maurice, A. D. 582; a spirit of

faction and revolt began to ferment in Constantinople, which, at last, terminated in the deposition and death of Maurice, and the election of Phocas, the Centurion, A. D. 602. Phocas was in his turn deposed and put to death by Heraclius, whose reign is rendered remarkable by one of the most obstinate and ruinous contests recorded in history, which was many years carried on between the eastern empire and Persia; the consequences of which proved decidedly fatal to the latter, and nearly so to the former, of those two powerful empires. This war between the Byzantine and Persian empires is remarkable for the obstinacy with which it was carried on, and the extraordinary efforts of the contending parties; but it is rendered still more memorable, by serving as an introduction to a train of events, at that time unforeseen and unthought of, but which were shortly after to astonish the world. It will easily be understood, that the establishment of Mahometanism is here alluded to.

On the commencement of the war, Chosroes, the Persian monarch, had entered the Byzantine dominions, and conquered Syria and Palestine, and sacked Jerusalem. He soon after added Egypt and Asia Minor to his conquests. During a period of twelve years, from A. D. 610. to A. D. 622, the eastern empire exhibited a scene of almost unexampled distress. All this time the provinces, from the head of the Adriatic to the suburbs of Constantinople, was ravaged by the Chan of Avars, who had subdued the

Huns, and resided in the royal village of Attila, in the great plain of Hungary. A Persian army was, during the space of ten years, encamped at Chalcedon, now Scutari, on the brink of the Bosphorus, directly opposite to Constantinople. The general consternation was so great, that the Emperor was about to leave the city, and transport himself, with the treasures of the imperial palace, to Carthage, when the patriarch, arresting his flight, led him to the altar of the church of St. Sophia, and extorted from him a solemn oath that he would live and die with his people.

Heraclius having by this solemn oath, on the altar of the Supreme Being, bound himself to the defence of his country, took the decisive, but dangerous measure of transporting himself, with an army, by the Euxine into the heart of the Persian dominions; and recommending his children to the care and protection of the people, he first made a descent in the southern parts of Asia Minor, where he gave the Persians a signal defeat, and returned to Constantinople, in order to carry into execution his project of an expedition, by the Euxine, against the Persian territories. Having vested the civil and military authority in proper hands, and given a discretionary power to the patriarch, and senate, to hold or surrender the city, according to the exigency of circumstances, the Emperor, with a chosen band, sailed from Constantinople to Trebisand, where he assembled his whole army, and directed his march to Taurus, in Media.

Every where he extinguished the sacred fire, and destroyed the temple of the Magi, demolished the statues of Chosroes, destroyed the city of Ormia, and delivered 500,000 captives. He then carried his victorious arms to the cities of Casbin and Ispahan, and totally defeated the numerous forces of the Persians. Chosroes exhausted the strength of his kingdom, and divided his levies into three formidable armies; the first marched against Heraclius, the second to prevent his junction with his brother Theodorus, and the third, being destined to act against Constantinople, marched to Chalcedon. On the European side, the Avars, with an army of 80,000 men, laid siege to that metropolis, which was then completely invested; and the Avars assaulted the city during ten successive days, without success. Heraclius entered into an alliance with the Turks, who, on this occasion, are mentioned for the first time in history, and obtained from them a reinforcement of 40,000 horsemen. Having mustered and reviewed his whole army of subjects and strangers, a decisive battle was fought on the banks of the Tigris, on the very ground where Nineveh is supposed to have once stood. In that battle the commander in chief of the Persians was slain, and their whole army almost entirely cut to pieces. Heraclius, on that occasion, is said to have performed prodigies, and to have slain three distinguished Persian commanders with his own hand. He then ravaged Assyria, and penetrated to

Dastagard, the royal residence of Chosroes, a place of unparalleled magnificence, which he plundered and burnt, and carried devastation and slaughter to the very centre of the Persian dominions. Such continual disasters excited a general revolt of the Persians against Chosroes, who being deposed, Siroes, his son, was proclaimed king. Siroes then put to death his father, and eighteen brothers, and made peace with Heraclius; in consequence of which the former boundaries of the Byzantine and Persian empires were restored.

The northern nations, who had overthrown the Roman empire, were yet in an unsettled state, and Europe still exhibited a disgusting scene of barbarism and anarchy; while Constantinople was triumphing in the successful termination of a war which had threatened nothing less than the extinction of the Byzantine empire. This was the political aspect of the world, when that empire was about to be assailed by dangers of equal or superior magnitude to those from which it had, by the most desperate efforts, just escaped: and the east was about to exhibit scenes of horror similar to those with which the west had, during the space of two centuries, become familiarized; but proceeding from a more extraordinary and unexpected cause. A political, religious, and moral phenomenon, made its appearance in the world, which, after the propagation and establishment of Christianity, has had a more decided, a more

extensive, and a more durable influence on the condition and ideas of mankind than any other event recorded in history. About A. D. 699, Mahomet, an Arabian, a native of the city of Mecca, situated not far from the eastern shore of the Red Sea, having assumed the name and character of a prophet sent from the Almighty, with an extraordinary mission, to reclaim his countrymen from zabaism and idolatry, and the rest of mankind from error of every kind, had, by these pretensions, excited against himself a faction of his fellow-citizens, in consequence of which he was obliged to fly, with a company of his kinsmen and followers, from Mecca to Medina, A. D. 622. At this place he assumed the military, as well as the prophetic character, and having made many converts, and assembled together a determined and daring band, whose courage he excited by the promise of a paradise, filled with all manner of sensual delights, to all his followers; but especially to those who fell in his cause: he assaulted and captured Mecca, and subdued, one after another, all the Arabian tribes. In examining and estimating the character of this extraordinary man, the most narrow-minded prejudice cannot refuse to do justice to his political abilities, particularly his extraordinary talent of forming a right judgment of mankind. He knew the sensual disposition of his countrymen, the Arabians, and of the people of the neighbouring countries; and he invented a paradise exactly suitable to their

taste, and calculated to gain them over to his cause. He was not unacquainted with the propensity of mankind to flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining what they earnestly desire, and the accustomed energy of their endeavours to obtain it; and on those principles he planned his religious system, in order to inspire his followers with courage and resolution to carry into execution the project of conquest which he had meditated. Considering the voluptuous disposition of the people of those countries, he allowed polygamy to his followers; but strictly prohibited the use of wine, and all intoxicating liquors, to which the people of that climate had no very strong propensity, and of which they could more contentedly suffer the privation. Mahomet is said to have adopted this prohibition of the use of wine from his experience of the dangerous consequences of intoxication, having, on a certain occasion, been surprised by the enemy, and in imminent danger of being cut off with his little troop, when his followers had been indulging too freely in the use of wine. Whether this circumstance be true, and the immediate motive to his prohibition of the use of inebriating liquors, or not, it seems that Mahomet deemed intoxication a vice which degraded human nature, and considered habits of drunkenness as incompatible with a capacity for great undertakings; and for this reason resolved, by taking away the temptation, to prevent the introduction of so dangerous a vice among his fol-

lowers. Distinguishing with acute and penetrating sagacity between the propensities which are implanted by nature, and those which are acquired by habit, he gave the most extensive indulgence to the former, but none to the latter. His religious system appears also to have been framed on an extensive observation of human circumstances, and a sagacious estimate of human propensities, prejudices, and general ideas. He observed, that the belief of one God only was the creed of the Jews and Christians, and that this belief had triumphed over all the different systems of paganism established among the ancients. Although Mahomet was totally illiterate, he had, undoubtedly, by his long and extensive acquaintance with the Christians of Palestine, and more especially by the instruction of his coadjutor, Sergius, the monk, obtained a knowledge of the Christian religion, of the circumstances of its propagation and establishment, and its ultimate triumph over paganism. He might, very probably, also consider the unity of the Supreme Being as so rational a doctrine, that it could not fail, in the end, to triumph over every system of polytheism and idol worship; and, consequently, that no religious system could ever make its way in the world, unless it was founded upon that leading principle. He had also observed, that the Christians, although loose and profligate in their morals, and divided into many different sects and parties, had, notwithstanding, so great and ge-

neral a veneration for the name of Christ, that he should make but few converts among them, if he entirely rejected the belief of his divine mission. He, therefore, acknowledged the divine authority of Jesus Christ's mission, but rejected the doctrine of the divinity of his person. This latter, indeed, he could not consistently with his plan admit, as such an acknowledgment would have been incompatible with his design of setting up himself as the greatest of all the prophets which had ever appeared in the world. Setting out upon these principles, Mahomet declared himself the last and greatest prophet of the Most High, ordained to preach the unity of the Divine Nature, and the true worship of the Supreme Being. After he had associated to himself a considerable number of followers, and found himself sufficiently strong for offensive measures, he declared that his divine commission extended to the use not only of persuasive, but also of compulsory measures in the propagation of his religion. The ordinances he published on that subject asserted, that he, and his faithful followers, were invested with a right of making use of armed force, in order to compel mankind to embrace the doctrines of the Koran, or word, which he publicly declared to have been conveyed to him from heaven by the angel Gabriel; and that, on their refusal, they should, if they were Jews or Christians, be allowed the free exercise of their religion, on the condition of paying tribute. To Pagans he did not allow

the same privilege of conditional toleration, and left them no other alternative than conversion or death. Mahomet's arms being every where successful, all Arabia was soon conquered; but although he entered into a war with the eastern empire, about three years before his death, which happened in the 64th year of his age. A. D. 632, he did not extend his power much beyond the limits of Arabia. His successor, Abubekar, commenced a war against Persia, which had not yet recovered itself from the confusion into which it had been thrown by the dreadful contest with the eastern empire, in the reign of Chosroes, which terminated so fatally to that prince, and to his kingdom. Abubekar died A. D. 634, after a short reign of two years, and was succeeded by Omar, in whose reign of ten years very considerable conquests were made from the eastern or Byzantine empire. Syria was conquered by Caled and Abu-Obeida, lieutenants of Omar; and Amrou, another lieutenant of the same prince, conquered Egypt A. D. 638. These were fatal strokes to the eastern empire, which never more recovered its former power and greatness. The loss of Egypt could not fail of being severely felt by the people of Constantinople, as that country was always esteemed the granary of the capital; and all Syria being in the possession of the enemy, opened a way into Asia Minor, and laid all the provinces of the Byzantine empire in Asia exposed to invasion.

The events which took place in the reign of Heraclius, exhibit a striking instance of the uncertainty of political science, and the contracted sphere of human foresight. The Byzantine empire saw, or at least thought, itself delivered from all danger, by its triumph over an implacable, a powerful, and, for a long time, a victorious enemy; by whose vigorous efforts it had been, at one time, brought to the verge of destruction; and Persia was reduced to so feeble and exhausted a state, as not to seem likely, at least during a long time, to give any cause of apprehension or alarm. In this prosperous situation, Constantinople seemed to have gained every point, and to have reached the summit of political happiness and security, by the entire depression of her great and dangerous rival; but this depression of Persia was one great step towards the aggrandizement of the Saracen empire. The signal success of Heraclius against Chosroes, by weakening, exhausting, and throwing into confusion, the Persian monarchy, caused it to fall a prey to the Mahometan Caliphs; who, by the acquisition of so vast a territory, became afterwards more formidable to the eastern empire than the Persians had ever been. If the war between Heraclius and Chosroes had not exhausted the resources of the Byzantine and Persian empires, the Saracens, in all probability, would never have become so powerful. If the Persian monarchy had continued in its full strength and power, as in the reign of Chos-

roes, before the commencement of that disastrous war, it would have served to balance the power of the Caliphate, which would, therefore, have been far less formidable to the eastern empire. 'When Heraclius had, by almost unparalleled efforts, entirely broken the power of Persia, it might have been conjectured, with a very great appearance of probability, that the empire of Constantinople was delivered from its most potent and dangerous enemy, and had not any thing more to apprehend on the Asiatic side; when, contrary to all expectation, the depression of Persia gave a formidable accession of strength to a rising power, which often threatened the subversion of the eastern empire, and actually reduced its dominions within a narrow compass.

Almost every scholar is acquainted with the story of the destruction of the famous Alexandrian library, by Amrou, after the capture of that city. There is, however, some reason to doubt of its authenticity. Eutychius, patriarch of Alexandria, who wrote a circumstantial narrative of the Saracen conquest, does not mention the conflagration of the Alexandrian library; and some good modern critics say, that Abulpharagius, who composed his history six hundred years after the event, and at the distance of six hundred miles from the place where it happened, was the only author of the story. It is, however, impossible to ascertain the documents from which this author compiled his narrative;

and the silence of Eutychius, who was prior to Abulpharagius, although it may weaken, does not completely invalidate the testimony of the latter. An author may sometimes, through forgetfulness, inattention, or from some other cause, omit in his relation an important circumstance, which is not the less true on account of such omission. The authenticity of the universally known, and generally believed, story of the conflagration of the Alexandrian library, by the Saracens, cannot now be either ascertained or invalidated; but it is very certain, that this celebrated collection of human knowledge has been much diminished long before that time. In the time of the Ptolemies, it is said by some to have consisted of 500,000, and by others of 700,000 volumes. It was, at that time, the greatest repository of literature and science existing in the world, and probably contained a vast collection of the learning of the ancient Egyptians. It is now impossible to trace the causes which occasioned its decline, but it is certain that many of the volumes of ancient learning perished in the time of Cæsar's Alexandrian war, when they could no more be restored.

The Caliph Omar died A. D. 644; and in the time of Othman, his successor, the conquest of Persia was completed by Caled. In this reign Abdallah, one of the lieutenants of Othman, invaded the African provinces yet subject to Constantinople; and that part of Africa, which

had formerly been under the dominion of the Romans, and afterwards of the eastern, or Byzantine empire, and which extended from Egypt to the Atlantic, and from the Mediterranean to the great Desert, fell under the power of the Mahometan Caliphs, A. D. 709. The invasion of Spain, by Tarik, lieutenant of Musa, who governed Africa, in quality of viceroy, for the Caliph Welid, took place, A. D. 710; and before the completion of A. D. 713, the conquest of the whole kingdom was completed, except some of the mountainous parts towards the north-west, to which some Spanish chiefs retired with their followers, and bravely maintained their independence.

The history of the world has not, previous to that period, been able to record so extraordinary a series of conquests as those of the Mahometan Caliphs, who within eighty-one years after the death of Mahomet, had conquered Persia, Syria, Egypt, all the northern countries of Africa, together with the kingdom of Spain, and extended their empire from the Indus to the Atlantic ocean. The conquests of Alexander had, indeed, been more rapid, and almost as extensive, but far less singular and extraordinary in their nature. The political and military circumstances of the Greeks, who conquered the Persian empire, were widely different from those of the Arabs, or Saracens, who subjugated so considerable a part of the world. Alexander, at the head of the combined Macedonians and Greeks,

as it has been already remarked, commanded an army, which, in discipline, military skill, and complete equipment, equalled, or rather surpassed, any thing of the kind which the world had ever seen. But the Arabians, emerging from their parched deserts, were neither numerous nor well disciplined. The Greeks had long been famed, above all the other nations of the earth, for the superiority of their skill in arms; and the Macedonians had, by the talents and the exertions of their politic and warlike king Philip, acquired a reputation, for discipline and tactical skill, equal, if not superior, to that of the Greeks themselves. But the Saracens of the desert, and the untutored tribes which inhabited the different parts of Arabia, had never been ranked in the class of warlike nations. They had no martial exploits to boast of. Their nation was not mentioned in the annals of war. Their history recorded no conquests. To what cause then must the rapid and irresistible progress of their arms, at that memorable period, be ascribed? This is an enquiry which the intelligent reader of history is naturally prompted to make, and in contemplating the state of things, at that time, it will be discovered, that two conspicuous and remarkable causes concurred to produce this singular phenomenon. In consequence of the ruinous contest so long carried on between Heraclius and Chosroes, with an obstinacy seldom paralleled in the history of nations, the Persian monarchy was thrown into a state of weakness

and anarchy; and the Byzantine empire, although at the last triumphant, had, during several years before, tottered on the brink of destruction, and, after the successful termination of the war, found her resources quite exhausted, in consequence of her extraordinary efforts. Thus were those two powerful empires, which held the political balance in the east, being quite exhausted and debilitated by their violent exertions, laid open to the attacks of a new and unexpected enemy. Persia fell a conquest to the Caliphate, and the Eastern empire found itself destitute of energy to check the progress of a desperate and enthusiastic invader.

The debilitated state of the Byzantine and Persian empires, at that critical juncture, was the great political cause which facilitated the progress of the Saracen caliphs, in extending their conquests, and propagating their religion. The enthusiasm with which Mahomet had found means to inspire his followers, was the essential and active cause of the rapid progress of their arms, and must be considered as an interesting circumstance in the history of the human mind. Numerous instances may be met with, of the surprising effects of enthusiasm on the minds of individuals; but they are the most conspicuous and striking when it animates whole nations and communities. Religious and military enthusiasm may, in certain circumstances, be productive of the most noble and laudable effects, and rouse the mind to the most glorious

actions ; but this kind of enthusiasm is, notwithstanding, exceedingly dangerous, and generally hostile to the tranquillity of mankind. The enthusiasm of the Saracen conquerors, is, perhaps, the most remarkable instance of the kind recorded in history. It had its foundation in their religious principles. The system which Mahomet had framed, was peculiarly calculated to excite both religious and military enthusiasm ; and may be considered as the most masterly plan of proselytism, and conquest, that had ever been conceived by any legislator or conqueror. By flattering the hopes and the inclinations of his followers with the prospect of a paradise of sensual delights ; a paradise accommodated to human comprehension, and adapted to human feelings ; and by promising to all who should fall in the support of his cause, and the propagation of his doctrines, an immediate entrance into this heaven of sensual felicity, he instilled into their minds the most powerful stimulus to courage and exertion. And at the same time, by inculcating the doctrine of absolute predestination, or unavoidable fatality, he extinguished the first principle, and strongest motive of cowardice, by persuading them that pusillanimity could not prolong their days, and that the greatest caution, in shunning danger, would not retard the approach of death. These principles formed the basis of that enthusiasm which rendered the Arabs of the desert invincible, while the exhausted state of the Byzantine and Persian em-

pires laid their dominions open to the attacks of those enthusiastic conquerors. During the space of forty-two years, which elapsed between the conquest of Spain and the revolt of that kingdom, which completed the triple division of the Caliphate, the Saracen empire flourished in the plenitude of united power and undivided monarchy. The lust of conquest subsided; and as it has ever been the case, especially among those nations who owe their greatness to conquest and rapine, the eagerness of acquisition gave place to the desire of enjoyment. The change is natural. Experience shews that this has ever been, and reason tells us that it ever will be the case. Among individuals some exceptions may be found, owing to peculiarity of taste and eccentricity of character; but in regard to communities, the great social machine is moved by the taste of the majority; and in every nation the majority act in conformity to the uniform propensities of human nature. This is an observation which will always hold good.

The political system of the caliphate was absolute monarchy. The authority of the Caliphs was, undoubtedly, as despotic as any that ever existed, as the supreme power, both spiritual and temporal, resided in the person of the monarch, who was, at the same time, king and high-priest of the Mahometan religion, and consequently possessed all the authority that can give to man power and influence over man. We do not, however, find that the Caliphs exercised

their authority in an unjust, cruel, or oppressive manner. They were the interpreters of the law, but not its source. The Koran was the universal and obligatory law which was to govern the conduct of the sovereign as well as that of the subject. In examining the political and religious principles of the Caliphate, it appears that the government, although despotic, was fundamentally of the patriarchal kind. The Caliph did not consider himself barely as the sovereign of a great and powerful people, but also as the high-priest of his religion, and the father of the faithful. Whether the departure of the Caliphs from these principles, or any tyrannical exercise of them, was the cause of the revolt of their provinces, and the dismemberment of their empire, is a matter of which history gives no certain information : for we have only a few of the most conspicuous outlines of the history of the Caliphate, and know very little of the political intrigues and internal circumstances of that empire. What we know with certainty of these things, is, that after the revolt of Egypt, the dominions of the Caliphate, in Spain, followed the example, and a triple division of the empire took place A. D. 755, forty-two years after the completion of the Saracen conquests. The three distinct Caliphates, however, flourished during the space of 180 years; but about the middle of the tenth century, the eastern Caliphate, of which Bagdat, on the Tigris, was the seat of government, was broken, and its temporal power

wholly annihilated by the revolt of its provinces under factious chiefs. After that period the Caliphs possessed no more than an empty title, and their office was confined to the affairs of religion; and at last their spiritual, as well as temporal authority, was extinguished.

The history of the Caliphate is very imperfectly known, nor do any authentic documents exist which can throw any considerable light on the subject. A remarkable circumstance which has been brought to light in later times, exhibits a proof that our knowledge of the Arabian history is very defective. When the Portuguese, under Vasco di Gama, sailed round the Cape, and explored the coasts of Africa and India, they found both the eastern coasts of Africa, and the coast of Malabar, possessed by nations professing the Mahometan religion; speaking a dialect of the Arabic language, and shewing every mark of an Arabian origin; and having neither the same manners, nor the same language as the Moguls or Mahometans of Hindostan, who were evidently a different people. Succeeding discoveries have shewn, that the state of the different islands in the Indian seas was, and to this day is, the same as that of the Malabar coast. The coasts of almost all those islands were possessed by Mahometans, speaking a corrupt Arabic, and beyond all manner of doubt of Arabian original; while the interior parts were inhabited by pagans of a different complexion, and speaking a different language. Whether these emi-

grations of the Arabs have taken place, and the coasts of Africa, India, and the oriental islands, have been thus colonised by enterprising adventurers, during the flourishing state of the Caliphate empire; or whether those establishments have been made by emigrants, who left their country, when the Caliphate had fallen into a state of anarchy, and become a prey to tyrannical usurpers and foreign enemies, is a question which no historical documents now extant can decide. The circumstance, however, evidently shews, that interesting events have taken place among the Arabs with which we are totally unacquainted.

Having taken a view of the rise and progress of Mahometanism, and of the rapid successes of the first Caliphs, successors of Mahomet; and also of the causes which produced such a spirit of enterprise, and facilitated its success, it will not, in the next place, be amiss to turn our attention to the genius and manners of the Arabians, and the state of literature and science among them under the Caliphate. These particulars will furnish the subject of our next correspondence.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XIX.

SIR,

IN attempting to delineate a sketch of the genius, manners, and intellectual attainments of the Arabians under the successors of Mahomet,

it will be proper to observe, that after the Caliphate was grown powerful and flourishing, the lust of conquest began to subside, and the impulse of enthusiasm was weakened. This change produced another not less important and interesting. The Arabians, who, previous to that epoch, were illiterate and despisers of all intellectual pursuits and acquirements, then began to cultivate the sciences, particularly natural philosophy, chemistry, &c. and to improve their mental faculties, by the study of literature. Their studies, however, appear to have taken a different direction from those of the Greeks and Romans. In their scientific and literary pursuits, their taste was probably determined by their religious principles, which were diametrically opposite to those of the Greeks and Romans, and all the other pagan nations of antiquity: The mythology of the pagans was a splendid and variegated system, calculated to fill the mind with beautiful, although romantic and superstitious, ideas; and the system of idol worship afforded great encouragement to the study of statuary, sculpture, architecture, and painting. The Arabs were, by their religion, prohibited the cultivation of those imitative arts; it being absolutely forbidden by the Koran to make or use the representation of any living creature whatever. Nature had endued the Arabians with a lively and poetical imagination; but their poetry was of a different cast from that of the Greeks, and other nations who

had copied after the Grecian model. They could not, consistent with the rigour of their religious principles, adopt the mythological machinery of gods and heroes, with which the pagans embellished their poems, and which the Christians, less scrupulous and less enthusiastical, than the Mahometans, have not hesitated to adopt, not thinking it of any dangerous tendency, since the extinction of paganism; although it is certain, that during the first three or four centuries, the Christians would have been, as scrupulous as the Mahometans, in this respect; and that before paganism, as a religious system, was entirely exploded, and its rites abolished, no Christian would have invoked Apollo, or the Muses, or have decorated his poems with the intervention of gods and heroes, or demi-gods. The taste, the ideas, and manners of men, are modelled by circumstances. The poetry of the Arabians resembled that of the Hebrews, far more than that of the Greeks and Romans; and instead of introducing the ideas of pagan mythology, they embellished their poems with allusions to the grand and beautiful objects of nature. This has ever been the taste of the orientals; and whoever observes the grand and beautiful imagery displayed in many parts of the sacred writings, particularly the Prophecies and Psalms, which are certainly poetical compositions, will confess it to be more natural, more instructive, and more interesting, than that of the Greeks, which exhibits nothing

else than a fictitious scenery, a mere phantasmagoriæ of illusory representation.

The political system of the Caliphate, influenced, in no small degree, the literary taste and pursuits of the Arabians. The oratorical eloquence of the Greeks and Romans, which, among them, was the grand object of a literary education, and of all literary pursuits, was of no use, and consequently held in no esteem among those people who lived under the despotic government of a monarch, in whose person all spiritual and temporal authority resided; and who was the supreme interpreter of the law, as well as the sovereign judge of his people. This despotism of their government was a good reason for the neglect of the study of rhetoric among the Saracens, who had so little use for public speaking. Their principal literary pursuits were history and poetry, with some comments on the Koran; but their theological studies were circumscribed within very narrow limits; for the Caliph, by his office of high-priest, and supreme ruler in spiritual as well as in temporal affairs, was the judge and arbiter of every thing written on the subject of religion, and his sanction, or disapprobation, determined the fate of every such performance. In natural philosophy, medicine, and chemistry, however, some useful discoveries were made by the Arabians. They also made a great proficiency in the study of algebra; and we are indebted to them for the arithmetical figures, or characters,

now in use, and which are beyond comparison more convenient, and better adapted to numerical calculations, than the letters of the alphabet, which, before the invention of cyphers, by the Arabians, were used in arithmetical operations. •

As to what we can learn of the social manners of the Arabians, from the scanty information that history affords, it appears that they were polished and humane, at least when compared with those of the Europeans of that period; and that, in the most flourishing state of their empire, they never plunged into that excess of luxury which has prevailed among the greatest part of powerful and wealthy nations.

In regard to the commerce of those ages, it may, in general terms, be said to have been wholly in the hands of the Caliphate and the Byzantine empire, both of them situated in the centre of the continent, and possessing all the channels of communication between the eastern and the western parts of the globe. Before the rise of the Caliphate, the eastern empire possessed the commerce of the world; and Constantinople and Alexandria were the great marts of every kind of traffic. After the Caliphs had conquered Egypt and Syria, the communication between Constantinople and the east was entirely cut off. It was, therefore, necessary to explore some other route to India; and a new channel of communication was opened with the east by the way of the Euxine, then overland.

to the Caspian sea and the river Oxus. By this long, tedious, and expensive route, the rich merchandize of India found, during many centuries, its way to Constantinople. The Arabians possessing Egypt, enjoyed an excellent situation for the commerce of the east; and, in order to open a communication between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, cut a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea. This canal passed directly through the city of Cairo, which was built by the Saracens; but, like all the other canals, cut for that purpose by different kings of Egypt, it does not appear that it had ever completely answered the purpose for which it was intended. Egypt, however, by its central situation between the eastern and western parts of the continent, possessing advantages superior to those of every other country, continued under the empire of the Caliphs, to engross a very considerable part of the commerce then carried on in the world. While Europe, not yet recovered from the confusion into which it had been thrown by the subversion of the Roman empire, and the establishment of so many new kingdoms and principalities upon its ruins, every where presented a scene of barbarism and anarchy, the empire of the Caliphs flourishing in literature and science, held the principal station in the political system. The Byzantine Empire, during the same period, although sometimes hard pressed by the Caliphate, vigorously repulsed all attacks, and not only presented a formidable front to its enemies,

but maintained the appearance of grandeur and power; and during the whole period of the existence of the Saracen empire, was its only rival and most formidable enemy. Constantinople was, in fact, the bulwark of Christendom, against the exorbitant power of the Caliphate. During the contest between the two powers, the Saracens twice laid siege to that capital. In their first attempt it was blockaded on the side of the Propontis by the Saracen fleet, from A. D. 663, to A. D. 675. The second siege of Constantinople was rendered memorable by the invention of the Greek fire, a discovery which makes a distinguished figure in military history. This was a bituminous composition, which burnt with increasing fury in the water, and could not be quenched but with urine or sand. It was invented by Calinious, an engineer of Hierapolis, in Syria; or, as some rather think, of Hehopolis, in Egypt, and was long kept a secret at Constantinople, and esteemed one of the great and valuable arcana of government. It was, however, in process of time, communicated to the Saracens and other nations of those quarters; and the Crusaders experienced its destructive effects. From the relations of those who returned from the crusades, it appears that the mode of using it was to eject it from large vessels, or tubes of metal, in a manner something similar to the discharge of modern artillery. It continued in use among the Greeks and Saracens

until it was superseded by the invention of gunpowder; but it does not appear that the secret was ever communicated to the western nations. In this memorable siege the Saracens had passed the Hellespont, and, with a numerous army, attacked the city on the land side, which was at the same time blockaded with a formidable fleet. The Saracen fleet, consisting of about eighteen hundred sail, was totally destroyed; and Constantinople saved by the newly-invented Greek fire, A. D. 716. The enemy was compelled to raise the siege, with prodigious loss, and afterwards to conclude a disadvantageous peace.

The history of the Christian church does not, during those dark and tumultuary times, afford any pleasing view. The progress of Mahometanism was an event not less inimical to the interests of Christianity, than fatal to the greatness and splendor of the eastern empire; for previous to that event, Christianity had been the religion of all those countries which afterward composed the empire of the Caliphs, except Arabia and Persia. To counterbalance this loss, orthodoxy had triumphed over Arianism, and witnessed its fall, by the conquest of the Vandal kingdom of Africa; soon after which event, Becared, king of the Visigoths, in Spain, with his people, renounced Arianism, and embraced the orthodox doctrine. We have already observed, that after the reign of Theodosius the Great, the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was the faith of the whole Roman empire, Arianism

being, at the same time, the creed of all the other nations which had embraced Christianity ; but during the time which had elapsed since the subversion of the western empire, all the nations which had established themselves upon its ruins, had adopted its religion, among whom the Visigoths of Spain, were the last, having renounced Arianism, A. D. 586, and conformed to the doctrines of the Catholic church, as established and defined by the decrees of the general councils of Nice and Constantinople. From that epoch the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and of the divinity of Christ, was the creed of the whole Christian world. Many subordinate doctrines and ordinances, not in use in the primitive ages, had gradually introduced themselves into the church. Religious, as well as political systems, not being of a fixed and invariable nature, unless in regard to fundamental principles, admit of various regulations and ordinances in conformity with the variations of human circumstances. Among these subordinate institutions, or religious customs, one of the most remarkable, on account of the division it made in the church, was the introduction of images ; an institution which has, in almost all ages of the church, divided the opinions of Christians, and of which, the propriety or impropriety, which can only depend on existing circumstances, has been a subject of discussion of the utmost importance.

The introduction of images into churches,

undoubtedly originated in the real or supposed propriety and utility of representing absent objects, by visible symbols, for the instruction of the ignorant, who were not thought capable of representing them to their own minds, by the operation of the intellectual powers. In the ages which elapsed before the invention of the art of printing, the multitude, in every country, were, as it has been already observed, extremely ignorant, and their means of acquiring knowledge exceedingly contracted. It was, and ever will be found, a difficult task to instruct persons, who have no ideas, except such as are impressed on their minds by the most familiar objects. The difficulty of inculcating abstract ideas into uncultivated minds, has been experienced by every person who has undertaken the task. If, from these considerations, we undertake to form an impartial judgment of the conduct of those early guides of the church, whose office it was to direct the human mind in the important affair of religion, and to inculcate the mysteries of Christianity into the gross minds of an ignorant and unlettered multitude, their situation, and the arduous task they had undertaken, will offer some apology for their supposition of the utility of some kind of symbols, or visible representations of Christ and the saints, as an easy method of calling to their remembrance the sufferings and the sanctity of those glorified personages, who were now removed from their sight; and this, no doubt, was all that was originally in-

tended by such representations notwithstanding the abuse of them, in some places, by the craft of the priests, and the superstition of the people. The adversaries of images, however, alleged weighty reasons against their admission into places of religious worship, as an incitement to idolatry. In our days all the reformed churches, without exception, reject every idea of any superstitious veneration of those visible representations; but the greatest part of them make no scruple of admitting them as ornaments into their churches, as well as into their gardens and palaces. The eastern churches reject the use of images in their places of religious worship, but commonly have them crowded with pictures. Whether a visible representation in colours, be either more holy, or less criminal, than if it was exhibited in the more durable materials of brass or stone, it most certainly requires a skilful theologian to determine. The church of Rome admits of both images and paintings in her places of religious worship, as a means of instructing the ignorant through the medium of the eye, which together with the embellishment of the churches, was, undoubtedly, the original reason of their introduction. That church also permits a sort of respect and veneration for those representations, which generally degenerates into idolatry, though the most intelligent Catholics disavow the idea of rendering them religious worship.

The dispute concerning the use and veneration

tion of images | were exhibited merely in an historical view. This contest, however, between the advocates of the use of images, and their opponents, was carried to as great a height as any that had ever agitated the church; and is particularly remarkable on account of its having occasioned the first schism between the Greek and Latin churches, and being the origin of those differences, which, in the end, produced their final separation.

The Christian church had, since the extinction of Arianism, in the sixth century, enjoyed tranquillity and union. In all ages, it is true, many different opinions, in religious matters, will exist among men; but when those opinions do not extend their influence beyond the breasts of individuals, or the regulations of some small society, they are not noticed by the historian. It is only when they influence the general state of the hierarchy, or disturb the tranquillity of the general system, that, like all other circumstances, which have an important effect on the ideas and condition of mankind, they hold a distinguished place in the history of the human mind.

The dispute concerning the propriety of the use of images broke out about A. D. 720, in the reign of Leo, the Isaurian, who is distinguished in history as the first of the Iconoclast emperors. As the dispute could not be amicably settled, a council was held at Constantinople, A. D. 754, consisting of 338 prelates of the

eastern empire. In this council, all visible representations, or symbols of Christ, except in the eucharist, were condemned as heretical, and ordered to be destroyed, A. D. 754. This celebrated dispute was not only the first step towards the separation of the Greek and Latin churches, but also, in a great measure, the immediate cause of the separation of Italy from the eastern empire, which revolted in the tenth year of the reign of Leo the Iconoclast; when a new Roman republic was established, which not being able to maintain its independence against the Lombards, was delivered from their oppression by Pepin, king of France, whose son and successor, Charlemagne, received from Pope Adrian IV. the title and dignity of Emperor of the Romans, which gave rise to the new empire of the west, now called the German, or in diplomatic language, the Roman empire.

The decrees of the council of Constantinople, however, did not long maintain their authority. Irene, an Athenian virgin, who for her beauty and accomplishments, had been advanced to the imperial bed and throne, began, in conjunction with her son Constantine VI. to reign at Constantinople, A. D. 780. This Empress, inflamed for her ambition, which so far overcome maternal affection, as to instigate her to cause the eyes of her son Constantine to be put out, that she might reign sole Empress of the east, was a strong advocate for the restoration of images. The second council of Nice, commonly

entitled the seventh general council, was held, in which the council of Constantinople was condemned, and images restored, A. D. 787. This dispute, however, although terminated in favor of images, which were always held in respect by the Latin church, having at first caused a temporary schism, paved the way, by the animosities it excited, for a total and final separation. Indeed the two churches of the east and west were never more cordially united. The eastern church had, indeed, restored the use of images; but Constantinople had not restored to the see of Rome the Calabrian estates and the Illyrian diocese, which had been seized by the Iconoclast emperors and patriarchs during the contest.

In the dark and gloomy ages which succeeded the subversion of the Roman empire, scarcely any thing occurs in the history of Europe which is worthy to arrest the attention of the historians, or of the reader of history. It may, in general terms, be observed, that the Franks, a nation originally inhabiting the farther banks of the Rhine, had so early as A. D. 400, began to make irruptions into Gaul, and soon began to establish themselves in that province, under the Merovingian race of kings. Clovis, the first Christian king of France, having by conquest, annexed the Gothic kingdom of Thoulouse to his monarchy, A. D. 508, made Paris the capital of his kingdom, and at his death divided his dominions among his four sons. After this the

French monarchy was alternately united, or divided, among the descendants of Clovis; but the most striking features of the history of France, is the exorbitant power acquired by those ministers, called Mayors of the Palace. The monarch fell into a sort of supineness, and neglect of public affairs, and committed the sole administration of them to those officers. Pepin d'Heristal, so called from his palace of Heristal, on the banks of the Meuse, having aggrandised himself, at the expence of his sovereign, had in effect acquired the regal authority, and wanted nothing but the regal title, while the monarch was nothing more than a mere pageant of power. Charles Martel, so famous for his signal defeat of the Saracens, A. D. 732, succeeded his father in the office of Maire de Palais, which those aspiring ministers had found means to render hereditary, and dying A. D. 741, was succeeded by his son Pepin, afterwards king of France. Pepin having caused his sovereign to be shut up in a monastery, ascended the throne, in which he was succeeded by his son Charlemagne, whose active and prosperous reign forms an epoch in the history of Europe. Having subdued the kingdom of the Lombards, in the north of Italy, together with the best part of Germany, and, by the conquest of Italy, delivered Rome from oppression, he was crowned Emperor of the Romans, by Pope Adrian the fourth, A. D. 800; and Charlemagne being king of France, reigned over Germany

and only came one degree short of her Arabian neighbours. Europe was making some advances in the same route, which a combination of unfavorable circumstances rendered abortive. The political and social circumstances of Europe were such as, at that time, counteracted every attempt for the restoration of learning, and the general state of the human mind, in that quarter of the globe, was such as baffled the efforts of some illustrious individuals, who exerted themselves without effect for that beneficial purpose.

Within a century after the death of Charlemagne, Europe began to fall into the same state of political anarchy as before his reign. That prince, following the pernicious examples of Constantine and Theodosius, in dividing the whole Roman empire, made, in like manner, a partition of his new empire among his sons. Within little more than a century, the family of Charlemagne had almost disappeared, and the nobles, who had been considerably restrained by the vigorous hand of that Emperor, began, under his weak successors, to render themselves almost independent of their sovereigns, and to oppress the people in the most tyrannical manner. Whatever the condition of the great body of the people had before been, it became now completely miserable. The feudal system was first completely established in France and Germany. Under the weak descendants of Charlemagne, the nobles of those countries assumed little less than sovereign power, in their respec-

tive districts, and reduced the monarch to a mere pageant of state, leaving him the title alone of king, while they themselves exercised an almost absolute authority over the people. It seems that the feudal system had, from time immemorial, existed in some degree among most of the nations of the north; but as this, like every other political system, is susceptible of various modifications, it is impossible to know to what extent it was carried, under what regulations it existed, and what changes might take place in it, among a barbarous and unlettered people, during a long succession of ages. We are wholly unacquainted with the history of those nations until the time when they were brought into notice by their irruptions into the Roman empire; and then their social manners, and civil institutions, underwent a very considerable, although gradual, alteration from the adoption of Roman customs, Roman religion, and Roman ideas. These changes, however, were slowly introduced, and the most prominent features of northern institutions, and of gothic manners, long remained. After the extinction of the race of Charlemagne, the feudal system arose to its greatest height. The usurpation of Hugh Capet rivetted its power in France, that prince being obliged to grant, or confirm, every privilege the nobles claimed, or had already usurped. In Germany and Italy the case was perfectly similar: the nobles taking advantage of the weakness of the Emperors, and the conti-

nual differences between them and the Popes, rendered themselves independent sovereigns, acknowledging only a nominal allegiance to the Emperor, as their common head, whom they opposed or obeyed, as it best suited their caprice or their interests. Many of the prelates of the empire adopted the same measures, and rendered themselves the sovereigns of their respective dioceses; and some cities and towns acting on the same principles, rendered themselves independent republics. From these contests, and from this fluctuating state of the sovereign authority, the numerous small principalities of Italy originated. Hence also arose the present Germanic constitution, which consists of a number of ecclesiastical and temporal states, and sovereignties, individually independent, but united in a political confederacy under one common head. Such, with some trifling shades of difference, was the state of France, until the reign of Louis the Eleventh, who first broke the exorbitant power of the nobles; and whose measures were pursued, until their dangerous independence was annihilated, in the vigorous, although sanguinary, administration of Cardinal Richelieu, in the middle of the seventeenth century. In Poland the same system existed even in our days, in its full extent and clothed in all its horrors, until a considerable part of its unhappy people were, in some degree, delivered from its oppression, by what was most absurdly called, by some, the extinction of Po-

pish liberty, by the three partitioning powers. Nothing, indeed, could be more absurd than to denominate the seizure and partition an extinction of liberty, because there is no doubt, but those parts of Poland which fell under the domination of Austria, Russia, or Prussia, are happy in the enjoyment of a greater portion of liberty under those governments, than under their own feudal system.

If we contemplate the aspect of Europe, during the middle ages, we can hardly view a more disgusting picture. Kings, whose power was little more than nominal, and whose situations were precarious and uncertain. Nobles continually at war with one another, or in rebellion against the sovereign. The people oppressed, attached to the soil, disposed of like cattle, and lying at the mercy of the great. The country every where crowded with castles, the nurseries of rebellion, the dens of the lazy and profligate, the retreat of plunderers, and the seats of riot and debauchery. Let those who have perused the histories of the middle ages, say whether this be an exaggerated description; or rather let them say, whether it be possible to overcharge the picture, or to paint, in colours too glaring, the scenes of disorder which prevailed in those unhappy times. It does not appear, that the feudal system ever arose to that established independence of the crown, in England, as in some other countries; but in regard to the depression of the people, it was little or nothing

behind them ; and our history informs us, that, at the commencement of Henry the Second's reign, there was more than a thousand fortified castles in this country. Let us, for a moment, compare the modern state of Europe with its state in the middle ages. It cannot be denied, that wars have been very frequent in modern times. Perpetual peace is, perhaps, incompatible with the imperfect nature of man ; but the calamities of war are not the less to be deplored. In the modern system of Europe, however, the power of the sword is restrained to a small number of great potentates ; and the operations of war are carried on by an order of men, who devote themselves to the study and practice of the military art. Those places alone, where the theatre of war happens to fall, experience its calamities, and even these are considerably softened by the humanity of modern warriors, when compared with the horrid barbarities of ancient warfare. The tranquillity of the other parts of the country remains undisturbed ; and the other orders of the community, who do not make the military life their profession, enjoy, in the midst of war, the calm security of peace. To the nations at large the calamities of war are chiefly perceptible in the increase of taxes, or the diminution of commerce. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, after the extensive empire of Charlemagne was broken into many independent and hostile states, the regal title being assumed by the most powerful chiefs, their revolt was fol-

lowed by a long subordination of anarchy. The lord of each castle assumed the character of a sovereign, and disclaiming the authority of laws, referred all to the decision of the sword. Every peasant was then a soldier, and every village a fortification; every field was tinged with blood, and every wood and valley exhibited scenes of murder and rapine. Such was the deplorable state of society, in this quarter of the globe, during the middle ages. Let then the inhabitants of modern Europe learn to set a just value on the tranquillity and security they enjoy. Let Englishmen in particular justly appreciate their excellent constitution, under which they enjoy not only a state of tranquillity, but also a protection and security for their persons and property, unknown not only under the feudal system, but also under the boasted republican governments of Greece and Rome.

While the political and social picture of Europe was such as it is here delineated, the state of the Caliphate did not afford a much more agreeable prospect. In the tenth century the empire of the Saracens being, like that of Charlemagne, broken, by the revolt of factious and ambitious chiefs, into a number of independent states, at last had a fate not a little resembling that of the Roman empire of old; for the empire of the Mahometan Caliphs, at last, fell a prey to the Seljukian Turks, and other barbarous nations of the north of Asia, (who, in overturning its power, adopted its religion,) in the same manner

as that of Rome fell under the dominion of the northern nations of Europe, who, while they demolished the political fabric, embraced the religion of the Romans.

The subversion of the Caliphate produced nearly the same wreck of Arabian learning, as the downfall of the Roman empire had done of the arts and literature of Rome, the northern barbarians of Asia, like those of Europe, despising every embellishment of the mind, and every pursuit which tended to improve and enlighten the human understanding. The eastern empire was then the seat of all the learning which remained in the world; and Constantinople the centre of all that was worthy of notice in literature, commerce, and the other arts and embellishments of civilized society; and such it continued until nearly the time of its falling under the Ottoman dominion.

With this brief description of the dark ages immediately preceding a more extensive diffusion of knowledge, I shall close this letter, assuring you, that, "

I am, with sincere respect, your's, &c.

LETTER XX.

SIR,

THE political and social state of Europe remained without much alteration during several centuries, after the establishment of the principal kingdoms into which it was at last divided,

offering nothing to the eye, of contemplation but such scenes as all political histories afford, and agitated by such commotions as commonly occur among nations only half civilized, and under such an unsettled system of government. A new and most romantic scene, however, began to be displayed, about A. D. 1096. In those ages, the fashion of making pilgrimages to the holy sepulchre at Jerusalem had become so prevalent, that, about thirty years before, the archbishop of Mentz, with the bishop of Utrecht, Bamberg, and Ratisbon, and about seven thousand followers, had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in order to offer their homage to the Redeemer of Mankind, in those places which had been consecrated by his presence and sufferings, while in the flesh. Under the polished empire of the Caliphs, those Christian pilgrimages had been encouraged, and the persons and property of the pilgrims protected by their civilized and equitable government. Those Mahometan princes, acting upon principles of sound policy, were not ignorant of the advantages accruing to their dominions, from such an annual concourse of strangers, many of whom were persons of the first distinction. But the barbarians, who had overturned the Caliphate, not only oppressed the pilgrims with unreasonable impositions, but frequently added insult to injustice. One Peter, a hermit, who had visited the holy sepulchre, being a man of a fiery and enthusiastic zeal, and incensed at the oppressions, extortions, and in-

sults, to which the pilgrims were exposed, undertook, at his return, to preach a crusade, for the recovery of the Holy Land from the infidels. This enthusiast succeeded so well, that the project was approved by the Pope; and, as it was perfectly agreeable to the martial and superstitious spirit of the age, the princes and nobles of Europe readily entered into the measure.

The most romantic scene of religious enthusiasm, and military enterprize, now opened itself almost all over Europe, and continued, with some intervals, during the space of almost two hundred years, from the setting out of the first crusade, A. D. 1095, to the loss of Acre, and all Palestine, A. D. 1291. The history of the Crusades is not unworthy of perusal, as it exhibits the human mind wrought up to the highest degree of extravagance, by religious and military enthusiasm; and paints, in the most striking colours, the dreadful calamities which mistaken zeal is capable of inflicting on the human race. The annals of the world scarcely furnished any instances of the horrible effects of this religious frenzy, equal to the scenes exhibited in those contests between the Koran and the Cross; especially at the siege of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Acre. Never did the flames of enthusiasm burn with more destructive fury than in the sieges here mentioned, in which every act of the most daring and desperate valour was performed on both sides. Historians differ in their estimates of the loss of men, as they always do in regard

to such particulars; but it is, however, certain, that those three memorable sieges stand fatally distinguished, by an obstinacy of contest, and a slaughter of the human species, horrid to contemplate. Indeed those religious wars were carried on with the most romantic spirit of desperate enterprise that religious and military enthusiasm could inspire. Innumerable armed hordes were collected out of England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, &c. and inspired by religious frenzy, marched away to butcher the inhabitants of Syria and Palestine. The princess Anne Commenus, daughter of the Emperor Alexius Commenus, in describing those armed hordes of the western world, some of whom she had seen at Constantinople, in their march towards Palestine, says, that it seemed as if Europe had been torn from its foundations, and hurled upon Asia. Those tremendous efforts, however, were not attended with effects of such permanency as might have been expected from so extraordinary a scene of exertion. It was, indeed, somewhat remarkable, and, in such an age, and under such circumstances could not fail of being looked upon as a favorable omen, that, on Good Friday, about three in the afternoon, the day and hour of Christ's passion, Godfrey, Earl of Bologne, after a most desperate assault, and wading through the blood of above seventy thousand Mahometans, stood victorious upon the walls of Jerusalem. This memorable event happened A. D. 1099, and Godfrey, as his valour

deserved, was, in an assembly of the armed chiefs, unanimously elected king of the holy city, and its adjoining districts. The short duration of this Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, which was conquered by Saladin, A. D. 1187, however, furnished to the succeeding crusaders a proof that the universal Parent, the God of peace and mercy, does not look on the blood of human victims as an acceptable offering.

One of the most remarkable events which occurred in the course of those nominally religious, but, in reality, romantic wars, was the capture of the city of Constantinople by the Latins, by which the eastern empire fell under the dominion of a band of enterprising and determined Italian, French, and Flemish adventurers.

The Emperor, Isaac Angelus, having been deposed, and deprived of sight by his inhuman brother, his son Alexius, who was only a youth, made his escape into Italy, and met with a number of the barons of France and Flanders, who were on one of these crusading enterprises, and were come to Venice, at that time the greatest maritime state in Europe, where they had contracted with the republic for the ships necessary to facilitate the execution of their plan: The young Alexius entered into a negociation with the French and Venetians, and a treaty was concluded, whereby they engaged to restore his father to the imperial throne of the east; and

he, on his part, engaged to unite the Greek to the Latin church. The French and Venetians, therefore, changing the destination of their armament, which, at first, had been against the coasts of Syria and Egypt, sailed up the Hellespont to Constantinople, broke the chain of the harbour, and assaulted the city from the harbour and the land side. The assailants being almost ready to enter, the usurper, Alexius, made his escape. Isaac Angelus, and his son, the young Alexius, were proclaimed joint Emperors; in consequence of which arrangements a cessation of arms immediately took place; but as soon as the clergy, especially the monks, understood the term of the treaty concluded by young Alexius, they reprobated the idea of an union with the see of Rome, and excited the people to fly to arms. This general insurrection was also fomented by Alexius Mourzouze, of the family of Ducas, who assumed the purple, imprisoned the blind Emperor Isaac, and put young Alexius to death. The legal succession of the Greek empire being thus overturned, the French and Venetians recommenced the war. After a siege of more than three months, they assaulted the city from the harbour, and, in spite of the superiority of numbers, carried it by storm, A. D. 1204, about eight hundred and eighty years after its foundation by Constantine. The city being given up to pillage by the Latins, the plunder was valued at 400,000 marks, nearly equivalent to 300,000*l.* sterling, an enor-

mous sum, exceeding the quadruple amount of the public annual revenue of any nation in Europe at that time. This immense mass of plundered wealth was esteemed the greatest ever found in any captured city, previous to that period ; and, as Villehardouin, a knight of Champagne, says, in his narrative of this transaction—"Those indigent strangers were converted into opulent citizens." Baldwin also, in his epistle to Pope Innocent the third, says, that "such a booty was never found in any city." The secret plunder, however, was supposed to exceed what was produced in public, notwithstanding the penalties of excommunication, and even of death, denounced against any who should secrete any part of the spoil. In the public distribution one share was allotted to every foot soldier, two shares to an horseman, four shares to every knight, and to the barons and princes more, in proportion to their rank. Boniface, Marquis of Montserrat, had the kingdom of Macedonia for his share, in the territorial division. Henry Dondolo, Doge of Venice, was commander of the Venetians ; and, notwithstanding his blindness and extreme old age, being between eighty and ninety, was one of the first who mounted the walls in the general assault. The Venetians had, for their territorial share, the greatest part of the sea coasts, together with three of the eight quarters of the city of Constantinople. Baldwin, Earl of Flanders, was elected Emperor, with one fourth of the

empire for his share. The rest of the empire was divided into fiefs, among the barons and knights, according to the feudal system then prevailing in the western countries of Europe, which were held by feudal tenure under the Emperor.

Constantinople is supposed, by Villehardouin, to have, at that time, contained four hundred thousand effective men. This, however, must be regarded as an improbable and absurd exaggeration, and from the appearance of general existing circumstances, an absolute impossibility. By M. Le Beau, (*Histoire du bas Empire*), that metropolis is supposed to have contained, at the time of its capture by the Latins, about one million, and to contain at present about four hundred thousand inhabitants, ~~a far~~ more probable computation than those of many modern geographers, who estimate their number at eight hundred thousand, or even at upwards of a million.

The Greeks, after this disaster, established independent states at Nice, Trebisonde, and Epirus. The Latins were not prosperous in the affairs of their newly acquired empire. The dissensions which prevailed among the barons, laid their dominions open to the attacks of the Greeks, who continually gained ground on them. The Bulgarians revolted, and the Emperor Baldwin, of Flanders, being defeated and taken prisoner by them, died in captivity, and was succeeded by his brother Henry, A. D. 1206. — Boniface,

Marquis of Montserrat, fell by the arms of the Bulgarians the same year. Henry, of Flanders, is represented as a wise and valiant prince, equally qualified for the duties of peace and war. He was also a monarch of liberal sentiments, and tolerant principles, and checked the proceedings of the Pope's legate in the persecution of the Greek schismatics. After his death, A. D. 1216, the Latin empire of Constantinople continually declined, and so pressing were the exigences of the state, that Baldwin II, the last emperor of the Latin dynasty, pledged the crown of thorns, supposed or pretended to have been worn by Christ, to the Venetians, from whom it was redeemed by St. Louis, King of France, who also purchased of Baldwin a portion of the cross, the lance with which the side of Christ was pierced, the rod of Moses, and other relics of great esteem in that age, and deposited them in the holy chapel at Paris, A. D. 1225. The Greeks of Asia continually gaining ground, at last Michael Palcologus having usurped the Greek empire of Nice, his general, Alexius Strategopulus, with an inconsiderable force, surprised and recovered Constantinople, A. D. 1261, and thus, after a period of fifty-seven years, that metropolis returned under the dominion of the Greeks; but a considerable part of the city had been destroyed in the three dreadful conflagrations which happened at the time of the siege and capture by the Latins; and Constantinople never more re-

gained its ancient splendor, nor the eastern empire its former power and greatness.

The history of the crusades, although it exhibits a lamentable scene of enthusiasm and slaughter of the human species, displays also a considerable advancement of European knowledge. In consequence of those destructive wars, which carried such numbers of Europeans to perish in Palestine, the inhabitants of the western countries acquired a greater knowledge of many parts of the east, and especially of the Greek or Constantinopolitan empire, than they had before possessed. The geographical knowledge of the Europeans was improved and extended, the sphere of European politics was enlarged, and the rudiments of several arts and sciences were introduced into the western countries; among which improvements wind-mills may be reckoned, which, before the crusades, were unknown in Europe. But one of the most important effects of the crusades was the diminution of the number and power of the factious nobles, which contributed greatly to the extinction of the feudal system. Many of the nobles, in order to procure money for those religious expeditions, disposed of their estates; and many petty princes sold their principalities to their sovereigns, as Robert Duke of Normandy sold that duchy to his brother, W. Rufus, by which it was annexed to the crown of England. Those sales threw many of the greater fiefs into the immediate power of the crown. Many also of the factious

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nobles were cut off in those romantic expeditions; and many of them dying without issue, their fiefs devolved on the crown. In fine, it is certain that the crusades contributed in no small degree to weaken and overthrow the feudal system, and that after the frenzy of crusading had subsided, Europe soon began to wear a more agreeable aspect. The power of the sovereigns began to acquire more stability, and laws were made more favourable to the people. The princes of Europe knowing their own interests, invariably pursued the measure of lessening the dangerous power of the nobles, and raising the commons to a degree of importance in the political scale. Of all the steps taken by the European princes, for the accomplishment of this great purpose, none was more effectual than that of granting charters and privileges to cities and towns, whereby the inhabitants were freed from feudal bondage, which led, by degrees, to the emancipation of the whole mass of the people. The abolition of the feudal system was, however, a work of time, and was not effected until after the lapse of some centuries. Its progress was gradual, and notwithstanding the successive efforts of many of the princes of Europe, the work could not have been effected without the improvement of civilization, and the extension of commerce. The privileges of the chartered towns enabled their inhabitants to extend their trade, and to explore different channels of acquisition; and by those means the wealth and

consequence of the commons increased. The peasants, instead of paying their rents in kind, began to be in a condition to pay them in money, and the lords soon found such payments more commodious than payments in produce, which were so difficult to dispose of to advantage. This mode of receiving their rents in money, in lieu of produce and feudal servitude, enabled the nobles to live more commodiously, more comfortably, and more elegantly; and at the same time rendered the people more independent of the barons, and consequently the more immediately dependent on the crown. ~~In~~ effect, the abolition of the feudal system was, every circumstance considered, conducive to the real interests and advantage of both the aristocratic and democratic orders, as well as to those of the crown. The system, however, was not abolished in the different countries in Europe at the same time. It existed in Hungary so late as A. D. 1785, although the illustrious Maria Theresa had put it under the most equitable and humane regulations by her *urbairu*n, A. D. 1761: its total abolition was only effected by that sagacious and humane monarch Joseph II. in Hungary, the year before mentioned, and A. D. 1781, in Bohemia. It still exists in a mitigated form in Poland and Russia, although the immortal Catharine II. whose memory, her wise laws and regulations, and her unremitting exertions for the improvement of her empire, and the happiness of her subjects, render dear to

of the circumstances of the times, and the state of the human mind in those ages. It is to be observed that of the different northern nations, which established themselves upon the ruins of the Roman empire, some were pagans, and those, which had previously embraced the Christian religion, had very obscure notions of its doctrines. They were beside almost entirely illiterate, and unqualified for the arts of peace and the management of regular government. The clergy were almost the only persons qualified to preside in courts of judicature, or to compose the cabinet councils of princes; so that Europe may be said to have received her religion, her learning, and her laws, from the clergy of Rome. These circumstances gave to this order of men an extraordinary influence, which they well knew how to improve. The elevation of Charlemagne to the imperial dignity, gave a greater accession of power to the church. As that prince received the imperial title and diadem through the influence of the bishop of Rome, he thought it his interest to augment, as much as possible, the influence and power of that see. In the times of anarchy and discord, which followed the dismemberment of Charlemagne's empire, the prelates of the church did not, any more than the temporal lords, lose any opportunity of aggrandizing themselves amidst the universal tumult.

The struggles for power among ecclesiastics, being like all other contests of a similar nature

among the rest of mankind, gave rise to such a variety of jarring interests, as produced dangerous schisms in the church. The contest concerning images, had left animosities between the eastern and western churches, which ought never to subsist among Christians. Photius, archbishop of Constantinople, a man of extraordinary abilities and intense application, and distinguished by his voluminous writings and extensive erudition, was a declared enemy to the see of Rome, and determined to break off all connection and communion with the Latin church. He filled the archiepiscopal chair of Constantinople, the space of twenty-nine years, from A. D. 857 to A. D. 886; during which period, he and the Pope reciprocally fulminated their excommunications and anathemas against each other. After the death of Photius, a sort of compromise seems to have taken place between the Greek and Latin churches; but A. D. 1054, the Pope's legates excommunicated the patriarch, and the whole church of Constantinople. Those mutual anathemas were certainly inconsistent with the spirit of genuine Christianity, and with that universal benevolence preached and practised by Jesus Christ, who came upon earth to bless, and not to curse mankind. In the latter part of the thirteenth century, the Emperor, Michael Paleologus, in order to avert a crusade which the Latins were meditating against Constantinople, negotiated with the Pope, and concluded a concordat between.

the Greek and Latin churches ; but at his death, A. D. 1282, the union was immediately dissolved. The Emperor, Manuel Paleologus, seeing the empire hard pressed on every side by the Turks, visited London and Paris A. D. 1400, in the reign of Henry IV. of England, and of Charles VI. of France, in order to procure some assistance, but the circumstances of those countries did not permit them to send forces to the support of the eastern empire. This prince also endeavoured to negotiate an union with the Latin church, but the negotiation broke off. John Paleologus, his son and successor, however concluded a treaty of peace at Florence, with Pope Eugenius IV. but it was universally reprobated by the whole body of the monks and clergy of Constantinople. During the space of almost six centuries, from the time of the patriarch Phocas, to the extinction of the Greek empire, an inveterate enmity seems to have existed among the clergy and people of Constantinople against the Latin church. Whenever a transient reconciliation took place, it was only dissembled, and was always brought about by the imperial court, with a view to obtain succours from the western nations, when under the apprehension of danger. John Paleologus had, before his death, renounced the union which he had made with the Latin church, and which he saw so much abhorred by his people. It was, however, acceded to by Constantine, his son and successor, upon the near prospect of being besieged in his capi-

tal by the Turks. A Cardinal Legate, from Rome, was admitted at Constantinople; but after he had officiated in the cathedral of St. Sophia, the clergy abandoned the church, as a polluted structure; and Phranza confesses, that the Emperor himself, with the few who had signed the treaty of union with the Roman See, were not sincere, and that the monks, and the whole city of Constantinople, displayed every extreme of fanaticism and aversion against the Latin church.

This irreconcilable aversion and schism, between the Greek and Latin churches, is, by different writers, attributed to different causes; by some it is supposed to have been a necessary consequence of the division of the empire and the diversity of language. The diversity of language cannot, however, be supposed necessarily to tend to a difference of religion, nor is any such supposition corroborated by experience. The different languages of the European nations, which composed the Latin church, never produced any difference in their religious tenets. They long remained united under the see of Rome, and diversity of languages was not in the least accessary towards bringing about the reformation. The division of the empire may, perhaps, be reckoned one of the remote causes of the separation of the Greek and Latin churches. The division of Europe, into so many different kingdoms and states, was not, however, productive of any such effect; they all unanimously sub-

mitted to the dictates of their holy mother, the church; but their subjection to the spiritual authority of the Roman Pontif was coeval with their first establishment, and their submission was consequently habitual and voluntary. The Greek church on the contrary, considered this supremacy of the bishops of Rome as an usurpation, to which it could never willingly or sincerely submit. At the very first establishment of Christianity the seat of empire was removed from Rome, and Constantinople was made the capital. It was not, therefore, likely that the patriarchs of that metropolis would long submit to the authority of the bishop of Rome, a city which had long been in the hands of those whom the people of Constantinople denominated barbarians. There is no doubt, circumstances well considered, but the people of the eastern empire thought, that if a visible head of the church was necessary, the patriarch of Constantinople had a better claim to the title and office than the bishop of Rome; and, therefore, it is no wonder that the archbishops and clergy of Constantinople should rather chuse to renounce all communion with the Latin church, than submit to the supreme authority of the see of Rome. This was the real and fundamental cause of the schism between the Greek and Latin churches: the difference relative to certain subordinate doctrines, institutions of discipline, and theological questions, serving only as incentives to blow up the flames of discord, and to widen the breach.

In the bosom of the Latin church itself ecclesiastical discord had nearly produced the same effects. During the long period of forty years, from A. D. 1378, to A. D. 1418, two Papal sees existed, the one at Rome, and the other mostly at Avignon; France, Savoy, Sicily, Arragon, Castile, Navarre, and Scotland, adhered to the see of Avignon; Italy, Germany, Portugal, England, the Netherlands, and the kingdoms of the North, adhered to the see of Rome. This dangerous schism was terminated by the deposition or resignation of the two Antipopes, and the election of Martin V. to the united pontificate at the Council of Constance, A. D. 1418.

The exorbitant elevation of the church was a natural consequence of the circumstances of the middle ages. In this enlightened age nothing can appear more shocking, or more abhorrent, from the universal feelings of human nature, than this spiritual usurpation; but if we dispassionately consider the circumstances of the times, and the state of the human mind, in the ages we are now contemplating, it will be found, not only consistent with the condition of mankind, throughout the Christian world at that time, but also, perhaps, better adapted to the then existing circumstances of Europe, than we are, upon a superficial view, inclined to imagine. For the general benefit of society, a very extensive power must be lodged in the hands of some of its members; and if we consider how few, in those dark ages, were endowed with the abilities

and learning requisite for conducting the great affairs of human society, we must allow, that the clergy were the persons best qualified for that important undertaking. This could not fail of giving an extraordinary influence and power to that order; and it is not the nature of man lightly to cast away that authority which he sees naturally thrown into his hands. Whatever we may think at this day, when the circumstances of christendom have experienced so happy a change, if we contemplate, without passion or prejudice, the times of ignorance and barbarism, which, during the space of seven or eight centuries after the subversion of the Roman empire, overspread the face of Europe; perhaps it might be conducive to the benefit and tranquillity of society, that, in those times of tumult and anarchy, so great a portion of power fell into the hands of an order of men, to whom the sacred name and authority of religion ensured the veneration and obedience of a turbulent, but superstitious people; perhaps it may even have been necessary to the existence of Christianity, during so many ages of barbarism and unlettered ignorance. The counsels of Divine Providence are unsearchable, and far above our comprehension; but whatever disorders may, to our short-sighted capacities, seem to prevail in the divine government of the moral, as well as physical world, there is no doubt but that all events coincide with perfect harmony in the universal plan.

After the enthusiasm of the crusades had at last subsided, Europe began to put on a more settled and less romantic appearance. Learning began to make a gradual, but slow advancement. The sciences began also to make some small improvement. Some men of extraordinary genius and erudition appeared at different intervals, and shone with a dazzling lustre, amidst the gloomy darkness of those ages. Among these, the illustrious friar Roger Bacon was an honour at once to the English nation, and to the university of Paris, where he completed his studies. Peter Lambert, Abelard, and other men of extensive erudition, were at different periods the ornaments of that university, which seems to have been, in those ages, the principal seminary and centre of European learning. But it was long before the efforts of those learned individuals produced any material change in the literary aspect of Europe. The condensed gloom was not suddenly to be dispelled. •

During the long period of darkness which obscured Europe, and, after the extinction of the Caliphate, overspread in like manner the countries which had formed that empire, Constantinople, although continually declining, was the point where the learning and science of the world was chiefly concentrated. The tenth century, which, in the western countries, was one of the darkest periods of gothic ignorance, constituted the most flourishing æra of the Byzantine learning, under the reigns of Leo, the phi-

lesopher, and his son Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The former compiled an elaborate treatise of tactics, and the latter a very extensive and particular description of the empire, in regard to its geographical and political state, the ceremonial of the court, and every other minute particular. In this *administratio imperii* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, we find the first mention of the Russians that is any where met with in history. The Russian empire then extended from the Luxine to the Baltic; Kiow in the Ukraine, and Novogorod in the North, were the capitals of the empire, and the two centres of its commerce. It was then powerful and flourishing, but afterwards fell under the dominion of the Tartars, an event which totally eclipsed its greatness. It is to be observed, that the Russians embraced Christianity about A. D. 988, in the reign of the great Duke Wladimir; and as they had their religion from Constantinople, and not from Rome, like the nations of western Europe, they never submitted to the papal authority, nor were united in communion with the Latin church. In the reign of this great Duke Wladimir, a body of Russian adventurers entered into the service of the Greek Emperor, and were employed as body guards under the name of Varangians. And it is a curious circumstance, and not unworthy the notice of those who delight in contemplating the migrations of men, and the vicissitudes of fortune, that a body of English, who fled from

this kingdom at the time of the Norman conquest, also entered into the service of the Byzantine empire. How long these two military corps of Russians and English subsisted in the Greek empire is not known, but they both acted a conspicuous part in the famous battle of Durazzo, when the Emperor Alexias Comnenus was defeated by Robert Guiscard, the Norman, Duke of Apulia, A. D. 1081.

The repeated efforts of individuals of consummate erudition and genius, who, from time to time, cast a gleam of light over the gloomy ignorance of Europe, began at last to dispel the cloud which had so long obscured the literary hemisphere. Those illustrious men who had, by their laborious studies, endeavoured to dissipate the ignorance of the times, had all arisen, almost without exception, amongst the clergy, especially the monks, who in their cloistered retreats enjoyed a leisure, which the anarchy, mostly reigning in the middle ages, had generally denied to the secular clergy. But, as government began to be somewhat more settled, and the habits of civilized life began gradually to gain ground, the successive and multiplied efforts of the promoters of learning began to be successful. A number of favorable circumstances began to concur towards giving a different turn to the manners and taste of Europe. Constantinople had, during the long period of European barbarism, been not only the seat of learning, but of wealth, commerce, and splen-

dor. The crusaders who visited that metropolis were astonished at its riches, magnificence, trade, and population, which could not fail of appearing to them in a striking point of view, when compared with the mean appearance of London, Paris, and other European capitals, of which the streets, in those times, were narrow, crooked, and irregular; and the houses, except those of some of the principal grandees, universally built of wood, and chimneys entirely unknown, as that useful part of architecture was not yet introduced into the houses of London so late as A. D. 1160. During the middle ages the stone-built castles of the great barons and princes were nothing more than huge, irregular, and gloomy piles, calculated rather for defence, than for ornament or conveniency. The age of the crusades, however, or that immediately succeeding, seems to have introduced a new and more magnificent taste in European architecture, which may be observed in our ancient cathedrals. The mode of architecture then introduced, which seems far too heavy and gloomy for the construction of palaces, appears peculiarly adapted to that of the temples of religion; for, notwithstanding its gloomy cast, it is not only calculated for strength and duration, but has an air of solemn magnificence, tending more to inspire the mind with a religious awe than the most elegant orders of Grecian architecture; and it may be looked on as particularly characteristic of the genius of the people of the mid-

dle ages, which was gloomy, bold, and romantic. Constantinople had all along maintained a degree of splendor, far surpassing any thing seen in the half-civilized countries of Europe. The imperial palace was, during eleven centuries, the admiration of all travellers who visited the east. It stood between the Hyppodrome and the magnificent church of St. Sophia; and its superb gardens descended by several rows of terraces to the shore of the Propontis. The primitive edifice erected by Constantine was made to rival the imperial residence of ancient Rome, which was built upon the Palatine Mount; and the improvements made by his successors still added to its magnificence. In the tenth century Luitprand, bishop of Cremona, ambassador from the Emperor Otho, to Nicephorus Phocas, thus speaks of it—"The imperial palace of Constantinople excels, not only in beauty and magnificence, but also in strength, all the palaces and castles I have ever seen." After that era the Emperors of the Comnenian dynasty still continued to embellish it, so that it was not to be wondered at that we find such encomiums of it in the writings of those who visited it in those ages. After the Latin conquest, the pillage of the city, and the conflagrations which took place at that disastrous period, Constantinople never more recovered its former splendor; and the power of the empire, as well as the brilliancy and opulence of the capital, rapidly declined.

During the declining ages of the eastern, or Byzantine empire, while ignorance, barbarism, superstition, and feudal anarchy prevailed in the western countries of Europe, almost every part of Asia was agitated with extraordinary convulsions; of which the effects were felt in the remotest parts of that extensive continent. The history of those nations, or tribes, who inhabited the vast regions of the north of Asia, is very little known; and notwithstanding the laborious investigations of some learned modern historians, nothing of an authentic nature, relative to the subject can be discovered, except a very few striking outlines, formed by those extraordinary emigrations and conquests which have produced important revolutions in the more southern countries, of which the history is somewhat better known. Those immense regions which extended over the north of Asia, and part of the north of Europe, from that part of the Pacific Ocean, called by our modern discoverers, the northern Archipelago, as far westward as the Baltic Sea; and from the Euxine and Caspian seas, and the frontiers of Persia, India, and China, as far as the uttermost habitable limits of the north, were by the ancients comprehended under the general denomination of Scythia, and the inhabitants of all those countries were designated by the appellation of Scythians. The Russians, who, ever since the ninth or even the fifth century, in which the cities of Kiof, in the Ukraine, and Novogorod were

founded, have been making a gradual, and in those latter times, a rapid and extraordinary progress in civilization, are of a Scythian original; and their empire now extends over the greatest part of the ancient Scythia; the different nations and tribes of which they have united in one vast political system. Of the ancient state of those extensive countries, of the original inhabitants, and of the migrations, intermixtures, wars, and revolutions which have taken place among those numerous and wandering tribes, formerly comprised under the general denomination of Scythians, and in latter times known by the appellation of Tartars, we know little or nothing, history furnishing no authentic documents relative to their affairs. At certain periods their emigrations and conquests have made a conspicuous figure in the political history of mankind, and produced revolutions, of which the effects have been extensive and permanent. The Turks, who made so distinguished a figure in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, and whose empire is yet so rich, extensive, and populous, are originally a Tartar tribe; as are also the Moguls or Moors of India.

* The most memorable occurrence in the history of the ancient Scythians, which has come to the knowledge of posterity, is the grand expedition of that people into the southern countries, which, according to the computations of the best historians, happened in the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. The true time of this

great emigration and conquest cannot, however, be ascertained, no more than the extent to which those invaders carried their conquests. It is, indeed, generally asserted, that they ruled over Asia Minor during the space of twenty-eight years, and oppressed exceedingly the Medes and Babylonians. Although it be a fact of indubitable authenticity, that this great Scythian expedition and conquest did take place, the particular circumstances attending it are totally unknown. If, however, it be true, that the domination of the Scythians expired about a year or two before the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon, it is not an improbable conjecture of Sir W. Raleigh, that, after their power was broken, and many of them were returned into their native regions in the north, several of their warlike bands entered into the service of that prince, and contributed considerably to that career of victory and success by which he carried the power and grandeur of the Babylonian empire to such an unprecedented height. This opinion is also corroborated by the scriptural expressions of the nations of the north, following the standard of Nebuchadnezzar, which cannot with propriety be understood of the Babylonians, Assyrians, or other native subjects of that monarch.

The most remarkable periods of the history of the Tartars, descendants of the ancient Scythians, are those which are distinguished by the conquests of Zinghis Khan, and his successors,

in the thirteenth ; and by those of Tamerlane in the latter end of the fourteenth and the commencement of the fifteenth century. Zinghis Khan began his career of conquest, A. D. 1206, and having conquered part of China, Persia, &c. died A. D. 1227. His successors, during the period which elapsed from that time to A. D. 1272, conquered all China, Persia, Asia Minor, the kingdoms into which the empire of the Caliphs was broken, Russia, Poland, and Hungary ; and penetrated as far as Neustad, in Austria, which was the limit of their conquests westward. Tamerlane, who, like Zinghis Khan, was of the Mogul tribe, the most enterprising and celebrated of the Tartar nations, began his reign about A. D. 1370 ; and died at the age of about 63, A. D. 1405 ; during which period he conquered Persia, Turkestan, the greatest part of Russia, a great part of Hindostan, and Syria ; sacked Aleppo, Bagdad, and Damascus ; conquered Asia Minor, and took Bajazet, Emperor of the Turks, prisoner at the battle of Angora ; after which he returned to Samarchand, the capital of his empire, and having projected an expedition against China, died on his march towards that country.

Thus it appears, that the northern invaders have been as troublesome in Asia as in Europe, and have produced revolutions equally great in themselves, although not equally striking to us, by reason of the little knowledge that we have of the nations which were agitated by those

bloody commotions, which totally changed the face of Asia, and are particularly remarkable on account of their having overturned the ancient Hindoo empire in India, and rendered that celebrated country, ever since that period, a theatre of anarchy.

The empire of the Mogul Tartars, it is certain, flourished exceedingly during two centuries. In the time of Tamerlane, Samarchand was the capital; but it is not well known where the seat of empire was fixed in the reign of Zinghi and his successors. Many conjectures have been formed on the subject, but without grounds sufficient to stamp upon them any higher marks of authority, than mere conjecture. The opinion of M. Pallas, who, from the rich burying places, supposes the principal seat of the Mogul, or Tartar empire, to have been between the rivers Yaik and Irtysh, to the southward of Tobolski; seems to be the best founded, the most valuable tombs having been found in that district; and the learned Mr. Muller, of the academy of Moscow, is of the same opinion. It is, however, extremely little that we know of the history of those nations. We have, in general terms, been informed of their most remarkable emigrations and conquests, and of the effects they have produced; but any farther particulars are mere conjecture. Indeed, when we cast our eyes on the continent of Asia, and contemplate the ancient, rich, and extensive nations in the eastern parts, we are surprised that our historical knowledge should hardly reach

farther than the banks of the Tigris. Such, however, is the case. A line of total and perpetual separation seems to have been drawn between the eastern and western parts of Asia. Our histories make no mention of the affairs of the Indians, or the Chinese; nor afford us any knowledge of what passed in those oriental nations, whose religious and social ideas and institutions are for the most part as different from those of the western nations, both ancient and modern, as if a total disruption of human opinions, and modes of thinking, had taken place between the eastern and western parts of this continent; and until the discovery of the passage round the Cape of Good Hope, the geography of the eastern parts of Asia was as little known as their history; a circumstance which we shall have occasion to remark more particularly, in the course of our observations on the changes of human affairs.

If we withdraw our eyes from the revolutions which convulsed Asia, in consequence of the Tartar conquests, and turn our attention to the Greek, or Constantinopolitan empire, we must there contemplate the melancholy spectacle of a state without energy, and verging towards its downfall. Constantinople, which, during so many ages, had proved impregnable against every attack, and bidden defiance to all the hostile efforts of the Goths, the Huns, the Avars, and the Saracens, had, by its intestine factions, and the crimes of its rulers, exposed itself to the

pillage of the crusaders, and the empire had fallen a prey to a band of French and Italian adventurers. After that fatal stroke, although the empire was re-established, and the capital recovered by the Greeks, yet the former was too much weakened to regain its former power and energy, and the latter was too much impoverished to resume its former opulence and splendor. Indeed the Byzantine empire, ever since the fall of the Comnenian dynasty, extinct by the inhuman, although perhaps justly deserved murder of the Emperor Andronicus, the last of that race, had exhibited the picture of fallen power and exhausted resources, of a government without vigour, and a people without virtue, the unequivocal marks of a declining state. Amidst the general decline, political and moral vices, however, instead of diminishing, continually increased. Soon after the accession of Bajazet to the Ottoman throne, about the commencement of the fifteenth century, the Greek empire was so much reduced as to be confined to a narrow corner, between the Propontis, and the Buxine, containing not more than fifteen hundred square miles, a territory little larger than one half of the county of Lincoln; yet this contracted spot, the melancholy remains of the most powerful and extensive empire the world had ever seen, was the theatre of crimes and political factions, and so it continued during the space of about 50 years, until A. D. 1453, when Constantinople, after a siege of 53 days, was

taken by the Turks, under Mahomet II. The military force which the Turks brought against that celebrated metropolis, is differently estimated by historians, as it is commonly the case in describing such transactions. Philelphus does not think that the whole force of the Turks could exceed 60,000 foot and 20,000 horse. It is magnified by Ducas Chaleondyles, and Leonard, of Chias, to above 200,000 ; but Phranza, who was a near spectator, states the Turkish army at 258,000. Whatever the forces of the enemy might be, it is, however, certain, that the force which the minister was able to enrol by the Emperor's command, for the defence of the city, was exceedingly insignificant, and strikingly shews the extreme degeneracy of that people, who still arrogated to themselves the title of Romans, and dignified the narrow corner they possessed with the title of the empire. Phranza says, he was not able to enrol more than 4,970 volunteers, and that, including the Italian auxiliaries, the whole defensive force of the city did not exceed eight thousand men. The Emperor Constantine Paleologus made an exceedingly vigorous defence ; and when the city was at last carried by assault, after having bravely, but rashly, refused very advantageous terms of capitulation, nobly fell in the breach by which the enemy entered the city. Phranza pathetically describes the shocking scene which followed. The persons and property of the citizens were, by Mahomet, given up to the disposal of the

army ; and the terrified people having fled to the cathedral of St. Sophia, and other asylums, were dragged forth, and, without any distinction of sex, or rank, chained together, driven through the streets like beasts, and more than sixty thousand of them sold into slavery, a circumstance shocking to humanity, and which displays, in the most striking point of view, the contrast between the undescribable calamities of ancient warfare, and the mitigated evils of war between the civilized nations of modern times. Such was the dreadful catastrophe of Constantinople, once the capital, and long the sole existing remnant of the Roman empire. And thus, as it had formerly been the seat of the Roman, it now became that of the Ottoman empire. A. D. 1454, and has ever since held that station.

The Greek empire of Constantinople had so long been tottering on its basis, and the symptoms it had shewn of its approaching extinction, were so unequivocal that no person of the least discernment could mistake in forming a conjecture of its impending fate. Many of the literati, and others, therefore considered it highly necessary to think of seeking some establishment or asylum, in other countries, in order to avoid being involved in the ruin of their own, which had long appeared not only inevitable, but exceedingly near ; for the existence of the Greek empire was, by the concurrence of various unforeseen circumstances, prolonged to a later period than from general appearances could reasonably have been expected ; and its extinction

would most certainly have taken place almost fifty years sooner, if the designs of Bajazet had not been frustrated by the successes of Tamerlane.

Among the literati of Constantinople, who began to disperse themselves among the Latins, was Leo Pilatus, who was the first Greek professor at Florence, and the first who brought the study of that language into fashion in the west, about A. D. 1560. Manual Chrysolorius established the study of the Greek language upon a solid foundation in Italy, and it soon became an object of general pursuit among the Italian literati. Some illustrious patrons of learning now began to appear among the princes and great men of Europe, especially in Italy. Cosimo and Lorenzo di Medicis, were, in the fifteenth century, the patrons equally of learning and the arts; and the efforts of the sovereign pontif, Nicholas Fifth, for the revival of learning, were not less vigorous, or less effectual, at Rome, than those of the Medici at Florence.

We are now, after travelling a long time in the obscure shades and rugged paths of gothic ignorance and barbarism, just emerging into the broad sunshine of a period of learning, civilization, and commerce, which infinitely exceeds the most brilliant ages of antiquity. I shall, therefore, for the present, conclude these observations until a favorable opportunity shall occur for renewing our correspondence.

Most respectfully, I am Sir, &c

LETTER XXI.

SIR,

THE period which now presents itself to our view, being infinitely more pleasing, as well as more interesting, than that which we have just been contemplating, I shall not make any apology for troubling you with my further remarks and reflections.

The period we now enter upon teems with great events, which are so many memorable epochs in human affairs. The place of the different nations of Europe, in the political scale, was now in a great measure fixed, and the balance of power was beginning to be in some degree established; so that we no more meet with mighty empires rising to an exorbitant pitch of greatness and power, and swallowing up all the neighbouring states in their tremendous vortices, like those of former ages. The most remarkable events of these latter times are of a different nature from those of antiquity, but they are not less interesting. The revival and rapid progress of arts, sciences, and letters—the invention and improvement of manufactures—the survey of the terraqueous globe—the discovery of countries formerly unknown—the extension of commerce, and the progressive advancement of civilization, with all its concomitant arts, embellishments, and conveniences, eminently characterize the period which has elapsed since about the middle of the fifteenth century, an

æra in which the revival of learning, and the resuscitation of the fine arts, began to grow conspicuous, and which was particularly distinguished by one of the most memorable events which occurs in the history of mankind. This was the invention of printing, the only means which could have been discovered of drawing the great mass of mankind from that profound abyss of ignorance, in which they had, even in the most enlightened ages and nations, ever been immersed, previous to the invention of that superexcellent art. This was a discovery wanted in the flourishing ages of Greek and Roman literature, when, as it has already been observed, none but persons of rank and property could acquire any knowledge of letters; and the great mass of the people in those countries, celebrated for being the seats of ancient literature, was buried in profound and unavoidable ignorance. This had ever been, and must ever have continued to be the case with the multitude of every nation, had not the invention of printing, by reducing books to less than a hundredth part of their former price, facilitated the means of diffusing knowledge among the people.

We have it from good authority, that about A. D. 1215, the Countess of Anjou paid two hundred sheep, five quarters of wheat, and the same quantity of rye, for a volume of sermons; so scarce and dear were books at that time; and although the Countess might, in this case, have possibly been imposed upon, we have it on Mr.

Gibbon's authority, that the value of manuscript copies of the bible, for the use of the monks and clergy, commonly was from four to five hundred crowns, at Paris, which, according to the relative value of money at that time and now in our days, could not, at the most moderate calculation, be less than as many pounds sterling at this time. These manuscripts were upon parchment, and undoubtedly executed in a superior style of elegance; but, in making every allowance, the value of books, previous to the invention of the typographic art, cannot, according to the most moderate computation, have been less than a hundred times as much as at present. The difficulty of acquiring knowledge, on account of the scarcity and dearness of books, necessarily caused a scarcity of teachers, and these accumulated difficulties presented insurmountable obstacles to the diffusion of literature; so that, how much soever a taste for learning might prevail, the advantage was entirely confined to the great and opulent, and to the monks, who had the use of the libraries of their monasteries; while an impassable barrier precluded the people from the acquisition of knowledge. How trifling would be the literary attainments of the people of this and the other countries of modern Europe, and how very contracted would be the diffusion of knowledge among the multitude, if these difficulties of acquisition yet existed? These obstacles, which, in all former ages, had been insurmountable,

were suddenly and effectually removed by the introduction of printing. The inventors of the typographic art have contributed infinitely more to the improvement of the human mind, and the general civilization of the species, than all the speculative philosophers of antiquity, and the cavilling theologians of later times; and if their characters be estimated according to their intrinsic value, and their merits appreciated by their utility to mankind, their names ought to stand in the registers of fame far above those of Caesar and Alexander, and other conquerors celebrated in history for their success in destroying mankind, and depopulating the world. Indeed, if ever the benefactors of mankind deserved to have statues erected to their honor, the inventors of the art of printing are certainly the men. Of all the events which have ever happened among mankind, the invention of printing constitutes, next to the establishment of Christianity, the most interesting and important.

The invention of this excellent and useful art was followed by another event not much less interesting and important, although of a different nature. This was the discovery of America, an event which has operated a total change in the political and commercial systems of Europe. The discovery of the properties of the magnetic needle, and the invention of the mariner's compass, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, by a native or inhabitant of Amalfi, a mer-

cantile town in the kingdom of Naples, had rendered distant navigations comparatively safe, commodious, and expeditions, by obviating a great number of those difficulties, dangers, and delays, which attended long voyages in the earlier ages. From that time continual improvements were made in the art of navigation, especially by the Venetians, the Genoese, and other Italians. The Portuguese soon began to emulate the maritime powers of Italy, and the situation of Spain was such that she could not be far behind. The Portuguese, however, first conceived the project of making distant discoveries. The monarchs of Portugal seeing their kingdom of little weight in the political balance of Europe, and every opportunity of exertion and aggrandizement on the continent denied them, by the situation of their dominions, which consisted of only a narrow shred of land on the coast of the Atlantic, conceived the noble design of raising their kingdom and people to wealth and importance, by promoting a spirit of discovery and commerce. So early as A. D. 1412, John I. King of Portugal, equipped a fleet for discovery. Many other attempts of a similar nature were successively made, which being all directed towards the south, the Portuguese made gradual advances in their discoveries along the coast of Africa, and at last proceeded as far as the southermost extremity; but the boisterous winds and tempestuous weather they there met with prevented them from doubling that

promontory, which, for that reason, they named Cabo des los Tormentos, a name which was afterwards changed to the more auspicious one of Cabo di bon Esperanza, or the Cape of Good Hope. This southernmost promontory of the African continent was discovered by Barthol Diaz, in the reign of John II. who, at the same time that his fleets were exploring the western coast of Africa, directed also his schemes of discovery and commerce towards the eastern part of that continent, by sending an embassy to the Emperor of Abyssinia, about A. D. 1486. While the kings of Portugal, inspired with an eager desire of fame and aggrandizement, infinitely more rational and more worthy of a place in the breast of a monarch than that extravagant and criminal thirst for glory which characterized most of the sanguinary heroes of antiquity, were thus endeavouring to explore the distant and unknown parts of the globe, and to open new channels of commerce and wealth to their subjects. Christopher Columbus, a native of Genoa, had formed the most daring and adventurous project ever conceived in the mind of man. The commerce of India had, in all ages, been considered as an object of the first magnitude and importance, and had always attracted, in a particular manner, the attention of the mercantile world. The Tyrians and Egyptians, and also the Jews, in the time of Solomon, were no strangers to this traffic. The Red Sea, and the Persian Gulph, were the channels by which the

Indian trade was chiefly carried on; and Syria and Egypt, the countries which, by their geographical position, formed the centre of communication between the eastern and western parts of the globe. During the time of the prosperity of Tyre, that city rivalled Egypt in the eastern trade, but afterwards the Egyptians engrossed the most considerable part of it. The central situation of Egypt is, indeed, peculiarly adapted to the trade of India; and if that country was possessed by an active, intelligent, commercial, and enterprising people, it might at present, as well as in ancient times, monopolize the commerce of the east. Under the dynasty of the Ptolemies, and also after the extinction of that dynasty, and the reduction of the kingdom to a Roman province, Egypt continued the centre of the commerce carried on between the eastern and western parts of the world; and Alexandria was the great emporium of the Indian trade. The traffic with the east was carried on by the Egyptian and Arabian merchants; and the merchandize of India, imported from Musiris, a mart for that traffic, on the coast of Malabar, into Egypt, was forwarded to Alexandria, by canals cut all, or the greatest part of the way, from the Red Sea to the Nile, or else by land carriage, as the distance was no more than from two to three days journey, and the commodities not very bulky. Alexandria maintained this pre-eminent station in the commercial world, from the establishment of the Grecian kingdom of

Egypt, by Ptolemy Lagus, about B. C. 310, until the time of its capture by Amrou, Lieutenant of the Caliph Omar, A. D. 638, including a period of about 948 years; and, before the building of Constantinople, was always reckoned, both in extent, population, magnificence, and opulence, the second city of the Roman empire. After its subjection to the Saracens, the troubles and various revolutions which ensued exceedingly injured its commerce. The frequent wars between the eastern empire and the Caliphate, impelled the merchants of Constantinople to open a new but incommodious channel for a trade with India through the Euxine, then across the land between that and the Caspian Sea, and afterwards by the river Oxus, to which the Indian traders brought their merchandize. This long, difficult, and incommodious conveyance, could not, however, fail of enhancing very much the value of Indian commodities at Constantinople, and the commerce of the east at last fell into its ancient and natural channel. The Saracens had a genius for commerce, and the Caliphs encouraged commercial pursuits, but during the flourishing state of the Caliphate, Europe was uncommercial and almost uncivilized. The intestine commotions which rent asunder the empire of the Caliphs, and agitated Egypt in particular, with various and frequent revolutions, prevented that country from taking the rank in the commercial scale, for which nature seemed to have designed it. As

soon, however, as the Italian states began to recover a little from the anarchy and barbarism of the Gothic ages, they began to open a trade with Egypt. The Venetians and Genoese, in particular, turning their attention in an active and spirited manner to maritime and commercial affairs, soon engrossed the commerce of Egypt and India. Alexandria became once more the emporium of eastern commerce, and the Venetians and Genoese, by the monopoly of that trade, rose to a height of opulence and power that astonished the world. The other nations of Europe, gradually emerging from barbarism to civilization, began to turn their attention to commercial pursuits, and undoubtedly would have been glad to have discovered some means of a share of that commerce, which had raised the formerly inconsiderable states of Venice and Genoa to such wealth and importance. The Portuguese, however, were the first who conceived the design of rivalling those Italians in this lucrative traffic, by opening some other channel of communication with India. This was the grand object of all the voyages of discovery which were undertaken towards the latter part of the fifteenth century. But while the Portuguese were gradually advancing southwards, along the coast of Africa, Columbus conceived the great design of sailing to India by a direct course across the Atlantic. It is somewhat remarkable, that this grand project was founded on a general mistake of the geo-

graphers of that, as well as of all preceding ages, in regard to the situation of India, and the other eastern countries of Asia. The geographers of Greece and Rome had never obtained any true knowledge of the situation of those countries, nor could any such acquisition of geographical knowledge be expected in the Gothic or middle ages. Marinus Tyrius supposes the country of the Seres, or China, to be situated fifteen hours, or 225 degrees, to the east of the first meridian, passing through the Fortunate Islands or Canaries. Ptolemy, who flourished in the second century of the Christian æra, reduced the longitude of China to twelve hours, or 180 degrees; but the true longitude of the western frontier of China is now known to be no more than seven hours, or 105 degrees, east from the Canaries. Some adventurous travellers of the middle ages, particularly Benjamin, a Jew, of Tudela, in Navarre, about A. D. 1160; and Marco Polo, a noble Venetian, about A. D. 1265, had penetrated to the easternmost extremities of Asia; but it appears, that those enterprising adventurers had either been destitute of the necessary mathematical skill, or unprovided with the instruments requisite for ascertaining the longitude of the places they visited; and the notions of geographers, relative to the situation of those countries, still continued confused and erroneous. They had also formed erroneous opinions of the extent, as well as the geographical position, of the eastern coun-

tries of Asia, and imagined that they extended far more to the east than they really do. Aristotle had, many ages before, conceived the same opinion, and thought it probable that India was not far distant from the streights of Gibraltar. Aristotle de Cæto, Lib. ii. Art. 14, and Seneca had adopted the same hypothesis, with so much ardor, as to affirm, that with a fair wind it was possible to sail from Spain to India in a few days. Columbus had made cosmography and navigation the grand subjects of his studies, and had acquired a knowledge of them equal at least to that which any person of his age possessed; but misled by established opinions, and the erroneous positions and distorted extent of the eastern countries of Asia, in all the maps of that age, he persuaded himself that it would not be a very long voyage to sail to India directly by the west. He followed the lights which that age afforded him, and his conclusions were justly made, but founded on erroneous principles. If the geography of the eastern countries had been as well known in the time of Columbus, as in the present age, neither he or any other person would ever have conceived the design of sailing to India across the Atlantic; for the length of the voyage would have infallibly proved fatal to those who should have made such an attempt. It is generally supposed, that Columbus thought some immense tract of land was placed in that quarter of the globe which lies westerly from Europe and Africa, and reaches to the eastern

parts of Asia. This, however, is only a conjecture, and it rather appears, that the chief or only expectation of that great discoverer was that of falling in with some of the eastern countries of Asia, which he for several reasons supposed to extend towards the east, and consequently to be not very remote from the western coasts of Europe and Africa. Indeed this opinion so universally prevailed, that when land was discovered, Columbus imagined it to be a part of India, until the poverty and savage state of the inhabitants convinced him of the contrary. In all the succeeding discoveries of the different islands and countries on the continent of America, the same opinions prevailed; and it seems to have been a long time before the Europeans could determine the question, whether America was in reality another continent, or only an extension of the continent of Asia.

In estimating the character of Columbus, we cannot hesitate to pronounce him one of the greatest of men. He was certainly endowed with a capacity to conceive, and a courage to execute the greatest designs. A patient perseverance, which no disappointments could tire out; a dauntless courage, which no danger could intimidate, and a calm composure, which no difficulties could disconcert, were the distinguishing characteristics of his firm and steady mind. If we compare his achievements with the exploits of most of the heroes mentioned in history, we must allow to his merit a decided

pre-eminence. His enterprises were planned for the improvement of knowledge and the extension of commerce, and not for the destruction of mankind, and tended to explore, not to depopulate the globe. If his discoveries have been followed by consequences destructive to the human species, it was what he did not intend, and which he could not foresee. When we compare the undertaking of Columbus with the voyages of our modern circumnavigators, we must confess, that after an impartial examination and estimate, his performances will hold the higher place in the scale of comparison. Succeeding discoverers have had his footsteps for their guidance. None of them like him launched into an unknown world, none of them like him ventured to traverse an immense ocean, of which the boundaries were totally unknown. The navigation across the vast Pacific Ocean, first performed by the Spaniards, was a great attempt; but when this was undertaken, the longitudes of Acapulco and Manilla were already known, and consequently the distance from the oriental islands to the western coast of Mexico, ascertained by astronomical observations. These fixed principles were wanting to Columbus. The age in which he lived did not afford him those lights. Geographical knowledge, as far as it could with certainty be depended on, was confined within narrow limits, and all beyond that contracted circle was mere conjecture and ideal representation. The art of

navigation was yet in a very imperfect state, when compared to that degree of perfection to which it is carried by modern improvements and experience; so that, without depreciating the merit, or detracting, in any degree, from the praise of our modern discoverers and circumnavigators, on whom too great encomiums most certainly cannot be bestowed, candour will oblige us to confess, that considering the superior geographical and nautical knowledge of the present age, as well as their superior equipment, none of their performances are characterized with that daring spirit of adventurous enterprise, which distinguishes the expedition of Columbus; to which posterity is indebted for the discovery of a new world, and the production of a new commercial and political system, as well as a multiplicity of new modes and arrangements in almost every department of society.

After eight years of tedious solicitation and unsuccessful applications to the different maritime powers of Europe, by most of whom his project was considered as romantic and extravagant, all the force which he was able, after a long series of disappointments and delays, to procure from the court of Spain, consisted of three small vessels, manned with ninety men, mostly sailors, and the rest gentlemen adventurers; yet, with a mind superior to every embarrassment, he undertook with this slender equipment to cross the vast and unexplored Atlantic, of which the

'boundaries were then unknown, exhibiting an example of the most dauntless resolution that ever resided in the breast of man. The particulars of this interesting expedition, the most remarkable instance of adventurous enterprise recorded in the annals of the world, are known to every one, and its consequences form an important subject in the history of succeeding times. After the return of Columbus from the discovery of a new world, new scenes began to appear, a new field for adventurous exertion was opened, which excited a romantic spirit of enterprise and adventure, first in Spain, and afterwards throughout all Europe. Daring adventurers from Spain went to exert their abilities, and try their fortune on this new theatre. Colonies were established: Hispaniola, Cuba, and other islands were colonized; and at last Mexico was conquered by Ferdinando Cortez, after a series of adventures and successes unparalleled in history, or even in romance. The conquest of Mexico was completed by the capture of the metropolis, after a siege of seventy-five days, A. D. 1521; and twelve years after Peru was also conquered by Francis Pizarro and Diego Almagro, in conjunction with Ferdinando Lugo, an ecclesiastic, whose department was to provide recruits and supplies. The conquest of Peru, although it was, in its commencement, impeded by innumerable difficulties, and attended with scenes of uncommon distress, was accomplished with far less difficulty and danger

than that of Mexico ; but the differences which arose between the conquerors themselves, at last, proved fatal to them. A civil war ensued, in which Almagro, being taken prisoner, was put to death by Pizarro : three years afterwards, Pizarro himself was assassinated in his palace, at Lima, by young Almagro ; and in the space of one year more, the young Almagro was taken prisoner by Vaco di Castro, and beheaded at Cusco, 1542. Nuñez Vela was defeated and slain by Gonzalo Pizarro, A. D. 1546 ; and this latter, the brother of Francis Pizarro the conqueror, and who had himself acted a very conspicuous part in the conquest of Peru, as well as in the civil wars which ensued, being deserted by his soldiers, was taken prisoner, and with the brave Francis Carjoval put to death, A. D. 1548, by Pedro de la Gasca, an ecclesiastic, sent from Spain, with a commission to reduce the rebels of Peru, and to govern the country in quality of Viceroy. Thus all the principal persons concerned in the conquest of Peru fell by the hands of each other, either in battle, on the scaffold, or by conspiracy and assassination. It is somewhat remarkable, that the persons who undertook this important conquest, at their own expence and risk, were every one of them upwards of sixty years of age when they engaged in this hazardous enterprise, in which their fortune was similar to that of the Macedonians and Greeks, who, under Alexander, conquered Persia. The Spaniards who conquered

Peru, like the Macedonian conquerors of Persia, acquired immense wealth, and extensive power, but like them they embroiled themselves in a train of civil wars, which embittered the remaining part of their lives, and ultimately terminated in their destruction. The daring and hazardous enterprise in which the conquerors of Peru embarked, at so advanced a period of life, is a remarkable instance of that inordinate avarice and ambition which actuated the first adventurers in the new world, as well as of that restless spirit of enterprise which particularly characterized the fifteenth century, and which the discovery of America had eminently contributed to excite. The age which immediately succeeded the discovery of America, and of the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope, may, with the greatest propriety, be entitled the age of enterprise and adventure; these two great discoveries having inspired men of desperate fortunes and daring minds, in almost every part of Europe, with a spirit of restless activity and romantic expectation. The spirit of adventure operated with such singular activity, that an empire more extensive than half of Europe, and containing a greater quantity of gold and silver than all the rest of the world, was, before the middle of the fifteenth century, annexed to the crown of Spain only, by the exertions of enterprising individuals, at their own expence, without any other assistance from the government, than commissions to undertake their conquests,

which brought such an accession of wealth and territory to the Spanish empire. And thus Charles V. who was at the same time Emperor of Germany, king of Spain, and sovereign of the Netherlands, as well as of a great part of Italy, became, by the conquest of Mexico, Peru, and the other countries of Spanish America, master of richer and more extensive dominions than any monarch had ever before possessed, without issuing a shilling from his own coffers; until the colonies were in a condition to repay the government the expence of the fleets and garrisons sent to protect them. The hardships and distresses which the first Spanish adventurers suffered, the difficulties they had to encounter, the steady resolution, the persevering courage, and the undaunted spirit of enterprise which characterized those desperadoes, have scarcely any parallel in history. Some of them, however, acquired immense wealth. Not one of the Spaniards who conquered Peru acted as a mercenary soldier, although many of them received advance money in order to furnish their equipment. In dividing the ransom of the Inca each foot-soldier received 4,000 pesos, a sum far more than equivalent to as many pounds sterling in the present age; each horseman received 8,000 pesos, and the officers in proportion; and Herrera says, that the plunder of the city of Cusco amounted to 4,000 pesos per man. Besides this immense booty, the whole country was parcelled out among the conquerors, each

to reside in them, to whom the circumjacent Spaniard becoming possessor of landed estates in proportion to his rank.

The discovery of a new world not only excited a spirit of enterprise and adventure among the people of Europe, but gave rise to new scenes of almost every kind, and to a multiplicity of opportunities of active and industrious exertion. Almost every part of the old world had long been peopled, and had undergone various revolutions. The establishment of settlements in distant countries was a new scene, and the colonization of America afforded new incitements to peaceful industry, as its conquests and plunder had done to military exertion. The general mode of colonization used by the Spaniards, and sanctioned by the government, was according to the Abbé Raynal thus regulated. In the distribution of lands among the conquerors of the new world, each foot soldier received 5,000 square feet for the purpose of building, 1,885 square toises for garden ground, 7,543 square toises for orchards, 94,288 square toises for European corn, and 1,448 square toises for Indian corn, besides the ground necessary for keeping ten hogs, twenty goats, an hundred sheep, twenty horned cattle, and five horses. The share of each horseman was double the quantity of building ground, and the quintuple of the rest. The towns were built by active and opulent individuals, under conditions and restrictions, planned by the court, which conferred certain privileges on them, and on such persons as came

lands were distributed by a proportional division among the founders and the inhabitants. The remaining undivided lands of those immense territories were left to be possessed by the natives, who were as soon as possible assembled in villages, and governed by their own caciques, according to the colonial laws, planned by the council of the Indies in Spain, under the authority of the court. The other nations who established colonies in the islands, or on the continent of America, proceeded upon nearly the same general principles, with particular variations, according to the variation of circumstances, and numerous colonies were, in process of time, established in different parts of the new world.

The history of the discovery, the conquest, and colonization of America is peculiarly interesting and curious. It displays the gradual progress of cultivation and commerce in countries before uncultivated, and covered with impervious woods and impassable morasses. Colonization was a process which had, at one time or another, taken place in every part of the globe; and the wilds of America exhibited an exact representation of what every country of the old continent had once been. Ancient history is wholly silent concerning the Herculean labours of converting the earth from an immense wilderness into a terrestrial paradise, by the process of drainage and cultivation; or, at the most, briefly says, that in the reign of certain princes

some marshes were drained, certain embankments were made, &c. If the priests of Egypt had left us an accurate account of the process of draining and rendering habitable that country, which, before the Nile was embanked by the efforts of human labour and industry, was, as is evident from its situation, nothing else than one immense morass, over which that river spread its waters without restraint, such a narrative would have been more worthy of our perusal and attention, than all the allegorical tales and lying legends in which they instructed the Greeks. All the particulars relative to the first peopling and cultivating of the different countries of the old continent, are buried in perpetual oblivion; and it is in the history of the new world alone, that we have an opportunity of contemplating scenes of this kind. The histories of America, written by Dr. Robertson, and Rev. Mr. Winterbotham, are excellent and instructive compositions, and contain a vast fund of information; but M. l'Abbé Raynal, in his Philosophical View of the European settlements, exhibits in the most explicit and circumstantial manner the particulars of the establishment of the different colonies. The discovery of America furnished a variety of new objects to the contemplation of both the naturalist, and the moral philosopher. In the new world almost every object was different from those seen in Europe. Birds, beasts, trees, and plants, totally different from any thing seen before, attracted the attention of those who visited

the new continent; and human nature was there exhibited under modifications, to which the old world afforded no parallel instance. No country with which the Europeans had hitherto been acquainted afforded an opportunity of contemplating man in a state of nature. This exhibition of human nature could only be seen in America. The ideas of those nurslings of nature were found totally different from those of the inhabitants of civilized countries, as might well be expected; and the first discoverers, who were no philosophers, attributed their want of comprehension, in regard to the establishments of regular society, and the ideas of civilized nations, to a defect of natural capacity, without considering that their uncivilized state had not furnished them with an opportunity of forming any ideas but such as were naturally impressed on their minds by the most familiar objects. This was particularly observable, whenever any attempt was made to instruct them in the Christian religion. They readily embraced that religion, and willingly attended its worship; but it was clearly perceived that they were not able to comprehend its doctrines. The powers of their uncultivated understandings were so limited, their observations and reflections reached so little beyond the mere objects of sense, that they seemed scarcely to have the capacity of forming abstract ideas, and possessed no terms of language to express them. To minds in such a state, the

sublime doctrines of Christianity, as well as every other kind of abstract knowledge, were incomprehensible. Few, therefore, of the natives of America were by the Spanish ecclesiastics thought capable of being admitted to the privilege of the sacraments of the church. A synod, held at Litua, pronounced the Americans to be, through a deficiency of understanding, incapacitated from receiving the Eucharist ; and accordingly decreed their exclusion from that privilege. The sovereign Pontif, Paul III. however deciding with better judgment and greater liberality of opinion and sentiment, in his famous Bull of A. D. 1537, declared the Americans to be rational creatures, entitled to all the rights of human nature, and the benefits of society in common with other men, and capable of being admitted to the sacraments, of entering into holy orders, and of enjoying all the privileges of the church. To this day, however, very few of the Indians are admitted into holy orders, and fewer still advanced to any dignified station in the church, a circumstance which may perhaps be attributed rather to their want of interest to procure those sacred emoluments, which the Spaniards desire to keep to themselves, than to any deficiency of understanding ; as it is well known, that the literary attainments of some of them who have had the advantage of a liberal education, have been far from deserving to be deemed inconsiderable.

Another, and indeed the very worst of all the

consequences of the discovery of the new continent, was the introduction of negro slavery. The first Spanish adventurers treated the unfortunate inhabitants of the newly discovered countries like beasts of burden. They divided among themselves the lands of the new world, and with the lands the ill-fated inhabitants also, whom they reduced to a state of the most abject slavery, and imposed upon them labours which their delicate constitutions were not able to bear. The natives of all those parts of America, conquered by the Spaniards, inhabited countries where the fertility of the soil spontaneously produced what was necessary to their support, and the uniform warmth of the climate precluded the necessity of clothing. In such a state, the natives of America, strangers to the wants and conveniences of civilized life, were unaccustomed to any active or laborious exertions, either of body or mind. This habitual indolence, with the relaxing heat of the climate, enervated their bodily frame, and rendered them totally unfit for labour. The difference of bodily strength and constitution between the American natives, within the torrid zone, and the Europeans, was so remarkably conspicuous, that one Spaniard was found able to perform as much laborious work, and also required as great a quantity of victuals, as five or six Indians; and the Americans were astonished at the quantity of provisions which the Spaniards, who are the most abstemious people of Europe, devoured, as well

as at the quantity of work they were able to perform. Men accustomed to so indolent a mode of life, and so scanty a diet, were totally incapable of supporting the labours of cultivating the ground, and working in the mines, which the colonists imposed upon them. Unable to sustain the grievous burdens with which their oppressors afflicted them, multitudes of those unhappy mortals were by death released from all their earthly sufferings. Hispaniola, Cuba, and other islands, were almost depopulated before the court of Spain was sufficiently apprised of the matter, to interest itself in the sufferings of the Americans. The tyranny of the unprincipled and avaricious colonists excited the abhorrence, and the miseries of the natives stimulated the compassion of several humane and benevolent Spaniards, both laymen and ecclesiastics, who had been witnesses of those scenes of horror. Among those friends of mankind the name of Father Bartholomew de la Casas will never be forgotten. This humane ecclesiastic, whose courage no danger could appal, and whose steady and resolute perseverance no difficulties could overcome, had been an indignant spectator of the tyranny exercised by the colonists on the unfortunate natives, and had loudly declaimed against their inhumanity and oppression. Passing from America to Spain, he endeavoured by every possible means to excite the public voice, as well as the humanity and compassion of the court, in favour of his op-

pressed fellow-creatures. This benevolent man, whose name will ever be dear to humanity, omitted nothing which he thought conducive to the emancipation of the natives of America from the tyranny of their oppressors; and representing to the sovereign Pontif, in the most glowing colours, the sufferings of the unhappy Americans, under the inhuman oppressions of the colonists, he left no stone unturned to excite the compassion of both Spain and Rome in behalf of those unfortunate sufferers, and to rouse the tunders of the church, as well as the indignation of the Spanish court, against those Christian tyrants and butchers of the human species. The colonists, on their part, were not inactive. They represented the natives as an inferior race of beings, born for slavery, and incapable of comprehending the doctrines of Christianity. This degradation of the Americans, from the rank of rational beings, was, however, universally exploded and condemned by the decision of Rome and Spain, where the public indignation was roused against the inhumanity of the colonial tyrants. Father de las Casas, and other friends of humanity, were indefatigable in their efforts; and it is a pleasing object of contemplation to see Spanish ecclesiastics of the fifteenth century stand forth the avowed advocates and assertors of the rational and inalienable rights of mankind. The court of Spain interested itself warmly in the cause of the oppressed Americans, and resolved to take

effective measures for putting an end to the disorders which prevailed in the colonies. The colonists, on their part, finding their cause daily losing ground, and seeing reason to apprehend the anathemas of the church, as well as the effective resentment of the mother country, took a new ground, and discovered a post which they supposed, and which actually proved, in some degree, impregnable. They represented the necessity of having hands to cultivate the new settlements, and to work the mines, without which they must be abandoned, and all hopes of drawing any advantage from the discovery and conquest of those rich countries be for ever extinguished; and they represented the natives as an indolent race, whom no wages, no rewards, could induce to work, and whom nothing but absolute compulsion could oblige to apply to any kind of useful labour. This representation indeed was not untrue. Their indolent and inactive life had rendered them equally unable and unwilling to apply to any kind of labour. Unaccustomed as they had ever been to the elegancies and luxuries of civilized life, and ignorant of their use, they could not suppose them worth the trouble of acquisition, and were astonished that the Europeans should either work themselves, or desire others to labour, for the possession of things not immediately necessary for the support of life. Gold and silver were things of no value among them: they had never made use of those metals, except such pieces

as they had accidentally found and used merely as ornaments; and they could not conceive by what infatuation the Spaniards could be induced to ransack the bowels of the earth, and to establish a system of laborious employment for the acquisition of those metals, which appeared to them of so little use, and which they could do so well without. It is very evident, that men of such ideas, and accustomed to so simple a state of life, could not be induced to labour for the sake of gain; for it is an invariable principle of human nature not to labour for the acquisition of any thing of which the possession is esteemed of no value. This plea, therefore, of the colonists, was unanswerable. The prospect of drawing immense wealth from the new world could not be abandoned. Hands were necessary to cultivate the soil and work the mines. The natives would not work for wages, nothing but compulsory means could induce them to employ themselves in labour. These circumstances precluded the possibility of their emancipation. The exertions of the friends of humanity were rendered abortive, in regard to the accomplishment of their grand object; but they were not, however, without a beneficial effect. The court of Spain seriously studied to ameliorate the condition of the Americans; and different plans were formed, and different measures adopted, for that purpose. Every new regulation relative to colonial affairs was favourable to the cause of those oppressed people. As it was not possible to draw any

advantage from the mines, unless they were wrought, and the natives would not work for hire, a circumstance, which imposed the necessity of using coercive measures, it was at length determined, that they should be freed from the tyrannical oppression of their imperious taskmasters, and only obliged to work by corvees, in rotation, and to receive fixed wages for the days they were obliged to work. This was, indeed, the most rational method of gradually overcoming their habitual iddolence and rooted aversion to labour, and of making them industrious and useful members of society. At present the regulation is, that in cases of necessity, in mining or agriculture, the Indians may be called out to work by corvees of eighteen days, in rotation, for a fixed salary. In Peru the seventh part, and in Mexico the twenty-fifth part of a colony may be called out at once, to work in rotation at such mines as are situated within thirty miles of their residence; and for those corvees they receive wages to the amount of about 2s. 3d., sterling per diem, which does not appear contemptible wages, but of which we are not able to estimate the intrinsic value, unless we were acquainted with the comparative value of money in proportion to that of the necessities of life in Mexico and Peru. However, as those are the countries where gold and silver abound above all others, we may reasonably presume, that money is of less value there, than in any other part of the world.

Notwithstanding the rational and humane measures adopted by the court of Spain, the advocates of American liberty were not fully satisfied; and Father de las Casas, whose character is strongly marked by that determined resolution which no opposition can disconcert, and that ardent zeal which can never abandon a favorite project, was firmly bent on trying every experiment in order to accomplish the complete emancipation of the natives of the new world; and in his zeal, for so good a cause, unfortunately hit upon the desperate expedient of negro slavery, thus alleviating the miseries of America by hurling them upon Africa.

History presents to the eye of reason and humanity the shocking spectacle of an extensive system of slavery existing among the nations of antiquity. We have, in a general view of the social system of Rome, under the republican and imperial governments, seen the rigorous treatment of slaves in the early ages, and contemplated with pleasure the amelioration of their condition in the latter times of the republic, and under the government of the Emperors. This happy change in the condition of slavery, proceeded, as already observed, from a variety of causes; and the establishment of Christianity at length added its benign influence to soften the condition of those unfortunate mortals, who were placed in that abject and depressed state. The Christian religion was, indeed, peculiarly calculated to produce this happy effect. By

teaching that the slave and his master must appear without distinction before the tribunal of the impartial Judge of all mankind ; it held out to the former a strong inducement to a patient acquiescence in his condition, while it inspired the latter with sentiments of humanity and benevolence towards those whom Providence had thus placed under his authority. And although the system of slavery was not absolutely abolished on the establishment of Christianity, its hardships were considerably mitigated ; for certainly no Christian, who was worthy of the name, could treat his slaves with unprovoked cruelty, or unnecessary rigour. The subversion of the empire by the northern nations, by reducing the slaves and their masters for the most part to the same state of villanage, under the feudal system, in a great measure annihilated the system of absolute personal slavery, as it had existed among the Romans. The Turks, and other nations, who subverted the empire of the Caliphs, again introduced the Roman custom of condemning to slavery their prisoners of war ; and the same system was, by way of retaliation, adopted by the crusaders. After the enthusiastic frenzy of the religious wars had subsided, in proportion as the minds of men became more enlightened, as religion became better understood, and better practised, and as the advancement of commerce and civilization diffused wealth among the people, slavery gradually disappeared, and the feudal system itself

was, by a concurrence of causes, at last abolished in several parts of Europe. It is, however, a melancholy circumstance, that the extinction of slavery in Europe was so soon followed by its establishment in America. We have seen that various causes concurred, in such a manner, as rendered the effect inevitable. In this life evil is invariably mixed with good, and we finite creatures are not able to comprehend the designs of a Providence, infinitely wise in permitting those scenes of misery which the world so abundantly displays. Slavery is a bitter cup, and we see what multitudes of mankind have been compelled to drink it, which naturally gives rise to this question;—What right can be claimed by man to exercise this tyranny over man, his fellow creature? To Christians this is a question of the most serious importance, which they ought to endeavour to answer to their own consciences, as they believe that it must one day be answered before the tribunal of the eternal Judge, whose integrity all the gold and silver brought from the mines of America cannot bribe, whose omniscience no cunning can elude, and whose omnipotence no power can resist.

Nothing but a combination of circumstances, which rendered the establishment of the slave-trade absolutely necessary, could have given a sanction to its existence. Father de las Casas, Cardinal Ximes, and other illustrious advocates of American liberty, had undoubtedly the best

intention in projecting and promoting the system of Negro slavery. If the natives of America could have been by any rewards induced to apply themselves to labour, the humanity and justice of the court of Spain would have put them on the footing of European labourers, and the importation of slaves from Africa would never have been thought of; but it plainly appeared that their unconquerable aversion to labour could not be diminished, and that the compulsion necessary to oblige them to work, was likely to entirely exterminate the whole race. The projectors of the slave-trade, who were undoubtedly humane and benevolent men, imagined, that by importing from Africa a number of slaves, taken prisoners in the wars, which frequently took place among the savage nations of that continent, or such as were malefactors, convicted of crimes against society, they might make useful labourers of many on whom the punishment of death or slavery would otherwise be inflicted in Africa, in consequence of martial law or judicial sentence. They might also, with no small probability of conjecture, imagine that slaves procured from a distant country, and purchased at a great expence, would be better treated and taken care of by their interested masters than the unfortunate natives, whose lives appeared of no value in the eyes of the colonists. It was also considered, that the negroes had not that rooted aversion to labour which so strongly characterized the natives of the new

continent, and that their robust constitutions, and the strongly compacted frame of their bodies, rendering them capable of undergoing those labours and fatigues which threatened the extirpation of the whole race of the natives of America. To all these considerations there might, perhaps, be added, the expectation that the introduction of a number of robust slaves into the colonies would in time be productive of a race of active and industrious labourers, and that in two or three generations, the Americans becoming accustomed to a civilized life, and acquainted with its conveniences, would gradually lose their aversion to employment, which has, indeed, been in some degree the case, and that the necessity of slavery would in time be superseded by the increase of voluntary labourers. These considerations might, and many of them undoubtedly did, present themselves to the minds of the first projectors of the African slave trade, and sufficiently evince the rectitude of their intentions. The consequences, it is true, have been in many respects shocking to humanity, but these they did not, and, indeed could not foresee. Man is liable to error; and some men are so circumstanced, that the slightest mistake in their conduct cannot fail of producing the most fatal consequences, either to themselves or to others; a condition too hard for a finite capacity; yet, if we carefully peruse the history of mankind, or extend our observations abroad in the world, we may easily perceive, that

many persons are placed in such a situation, among whom the first projectors of the slave-trade may, with great propriety be numbered.

It was indeed, impossible that the persons who planned the system of negro slavery, in order to alleviate the sufferings of humanity in America, should foresee in their full extent the calamities which their project would bring upon the people of Africa. It is computed by M. l'Abbé Raynal, that between eight and nine millions of negroes have been imported into the American colonies, and that one million and an half do not now remain. If this calculation be just, or nearly so, it exhibits a destruction of the human species, of which the history of mankind affords few examples, and which must proceed from a series of sufferings shocking to humanity. It cannot be attributed to the change of climate, for the countries from whence the negroes are brought, are situated within the torrid zone, and in the same climate as most of the American settlements into which they are imported; and, excepting Batavia, scarcely any countries can be found on the surface of the globe where the air is more sultry and insalubrious than in Negroland and Guinca. This singular and shocking destruction of the unhappy Africans, may therefore without doubt, be chiefly attributed to their violent separation from their country and their connections, and that depression of spirits inseparable from a state of slavery.

The miseries of the unhappy Africans have, however, been very much alleviated by the humane regulations of the different European powers who are concerned in the slave-trade. Among those, the benevolent and well judged measures adopted, at different times, by the British Parliament, hold a conspicuous place, and strikingly exhibit the wisdom, the equity, and the humanity of that august body. The question of the propriety of an entire abolition of the slave-trade has been amply discussed in that illustrious senate, and all the powers of augmentation have been displayed on both sides. A total abolition of that traffic has unfortunately been found impracticable, or calculated to produce evils of a greater magnitude than those it was intended to remedy. These parliamentary discussions, however, have not been without the most beneficial effect, in giving rise to a number of humane and judicious arrangements in the system of the slave-trade; and there is no doubt but further steps will still be taken to alleviate the miseries of slavery, in proportion as circumstances appear favourable to the propriety and safety of such measures. It is to be hoped, and may, indeed, with every degree of probability be expected, that slavery will be gradually abolished in America, as it has been in Europe; and that in process of time the circumstances of the colonies will render its existence unnecessary. Every friend of mankind wishes for the speedy approach of that desirable

moment. Several members of the British Parliament, not less illustrious for their senatorial abilities, than for their philanthropy and liberality of sentiment, have, in different sessions, distinguished themselves in the noblest cause that ever came before a national senate, or ever called senatorial talents into exertion; and, although the moment marked in the volume of Divine Providence, for the accomplishment of this great work, was not yet arrived, there is no doubt but their benevolent intentions and endeavours have received a reward:—

“ Which nothing earthly gives, or can destroy

“ The soul’s calm sunshine and the heart-felt joy.”

Such friends of humanity will never be wanting in the British senate; for we are not to imagine that those members of that enlightened body, who opposed the abolition of the African slave-trade, were actuated by sentiments less humane, or were less desirous of the general welfare of the human species, than those who so strenuously supported the motion. There is not the least reason to doubt, but the opponents of the abolition would have been happy to join with the advocates of that measure if they could have persuaded themselves of the possibility of carrying it into effect with safety.

The transactions which have taken place in St. Domingo, have given reason to augur less favourably on the emancipation of the negroes than many had formerly done, and will, un-

doubtedly, for a long time, be remembered to their disadvantage. The insurrection of the enfranchised slaves of that once flourishing colony is, indeed, an unfortunate circumstance, which will operate very much to the disadvantage of the African cause in all the different European settlements; but it ought also to be considered, that France emancipated her slaves at a time when the unsettled state of both the colonies and the mother country rendered the crisis extremely unfavourable to such a measure. If the abolition of negro slavery had taken place in the French colonies in a time of public tranquillity, either under the former monarchical or the present imperial government, and the attention of the emancipated negroes been directed to the employments and pursuits of peaceful industry, instead of putting arms in their hands, as was done in St. Domingo, there is every reason to suppose that no such tragical effects would have been produced by their emancipation, as that island has unfortunately exhibited. It is, therefore, to be hoped, that the rebellion of the French colonies will not, in future discussions of the important question of the abolition of slavery, be allowed to have greater weight in the scale of augmentation than is really and unequivocally given it by existing circumstances considered with all their combinations. It is, indeed, to be hoped, and even without pretending to a spirit of prophecy, may be predicted, that

every species of slavery will, in time, be abolished in all the European settlements.

I am fully convinced that those reflections, on so interesting a subject of human history as the slave-trade, will not seem tedious to you; and I am sufficiently acquainted with the native benevolence of your heart, to believe that you will contemplate with pleasure every probability of its future abolition. Joining, therefore, with you in every sentiment on that subject,

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER XXII.

SIR,

WE come now to investigate one of the most important consequences of the discovery of America, (*viz.*) its influence on the prices of the necessaries of life, in this and the other countries of Europe.

The discovery of America is one of those important events which have produced an extraordinary and lasting change in the system of human affairs. It has been already observed, that this remarkable event soon excited a spirit of enterprise and adventure, before unknown, and produced a system of colonization, with which the world had long been unacquainted: and that it has given rise to a new system of slavery which humanity must deplore and abhor, although it cannot, perhaps, without great diffi-

culty, nor without waiting for a favourable coincidence of circumstances, now be abolished. American agriculture has also rendered cheap and plentiful a number of the conveniences and luxuries of life, which before were exceedingly scarce and dear; and introduced many others before wholly unknown. The sugar cane had been cultivated from time immemorial, in some parts of Asia and Africa; and sugar was one of those articles of luxury with which the traffic of the port of Alexandria supplied Rome and other parts of the empire. Sugar was known to the Romans by the name of *Saccharum*, but was very scarce and dear, and used only in medicine, or at the tables of the opulent. The cultivation of the sugar cane was introduced into Sicily about the middle of the twelfth century. From Sicily it was brought into the southern provinces of Spain. From thence it was carried into Madeira and the Canaries, and from those islands into America, where the soil and climate were found so favourable to the production of that article of commerce, that it became a staple commodity in several of the colonies. Coffee, a native of Abyssinia, had at an early period been transplanted into Arabia; and, like sugar, constituted an article of the Alexandrian commerce, but was little known in ancient Europe. This was also introduced into America, where it prospered exceedingly; and the profits arising from these two articles inciting the colonists to an extensive cultivation of them, the quantities

imported into Europe rendered them cheap and plentiful. Tobacco was also unknown in these parts of the world until it was introduced into England by Captain Lane, who brought back some persons sent by Sir Walter Raleigh to make a settlement in Virginia. This, like sugar, is now become an article of common use.

The introduction of many articles of luxury, unknown to the Greeks and Romans, as well as the bringing into common use many others, which, by reason of their scarceness and enormous price, could be obtained only by the great and wealthy among the ancients, was not, however, the most important alteration produced in the commercial and social system of Europe by the discovery and colonization of the new world. The vast and continual influx of gold and silver from the American mines into Europe, by rendering those metals beyond all comparison more plentiful than formerly, and consequently diminishing their value, advanced the prices of every kind of European produce, and, in general, of every kind of property. This extraordinary advancement of the value of European property; which, after the importation of American wealth had begun to take place, was soon augmented in a three or fourfold, and at last, in many instances, in a more than a tenfold proportion, is the peculiar characteristic, which, in this respect, distinguishes the discovery of the new world above every other event which has ever happened. It does not appear that any very remarkable ad-

vancement in the prices of provisions, &c. had, except in seasons of extreme scarcity, taken place during several centuries, although some small and gradual augmentation be perceptible, in proportion as civilization increased, and commerce was more extended. The augmentation, however, and diffusion of wealth, had proceeded so slowly in Europe, before the influx of gold and silver from America had begun to produce its effects on the commercial system, that so late as A. D. 1531, when the conquest of Peru was not completed, and that of Mexico, as well as Terra-Firma, and other rich countries, so recently accomplished, as not yet to have poured any considerable quantity of their wealth into Europe, a great feast being held at Ely-House, London, Mr. Pennant gives us the following bill of fare,

	<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	
24 Beaves or bullocks, at	1	6	8	each
1 Ox, from the shambles -	1	4	0	
100 Fat sheep, at - - -	0	2	10	each.
51 Large calves, at - -	0	4	8	each.
Best pullets - - - -	0	0	2½	apiece.
Common pullets - - -	0	0	2	apiece.
Pigeons, 37 doz. at - -	0	0	2	per doz.
Larks, 350 doz. at - -	0	0	5	ditto.

• Minutiae omitted.

This feast was honored with the presence of King Henry VIII. and his Queen Catharine of Arragon; and Mr. Pennant has, in his history of

London, favored us with the bill of expences, which to us, at this time, would seem almost incredible, if we were not acquainted with the circumstances which have produced so extraordinary a change since that time. The same author also informs us, that A. D. 1536, the mills belonging to the Priory of Bermondsey were let for 6*l.* which was the estimated value of 18 quarters of good wheat, *i. e.* 6*s.* 8*d.* per quarter. Without, however, entering into tedious details, it suffices to observe, that a great number of authentic historical documents exist, both in this and other countries, which shews the little value of landed property and its produce, in Europe, during the middle ages, and its slow advancement, until the discovery and colonization of the new world had taken place; or, in other words, the scarcity of gold and silver before the American mines had begun to pour their wealth into the old world.

The circulation of gold and silver in different ages, and in the different parts of the world, is a curious and interesting, but in some respects a difficult subject of investigation. It appears that those metals were used as a medium of commerce so early as in the time of Abraham, and that they served as ornamental articles of dress, in a period little less remote; and indeed, although we have no authentic information relative to this particular, it is extremely probable that gold and silver were used as ornaments before they were established as a medium

of commerce, and the standard whereby to estimate the comparative value of other articles. We may collect from sacred history, that gold and silver, as well as divers kinds of precious stones, were sufficiently plentiful in Egypt at the time of the egress of the Israelites; and the valuable offerings of the people, for the construction of the tabernacle, with all the rich materials of which that structure was composed, as well as those used for the High Priest's garments, and in the whole apparatus of religion, were furnished out of those treasures which they had carried out of that country; for no other channel can be discovered, or even with any appearance of probability imagined, by which the Israelites could at that period be supplied with such plenty of those valuable commodities; for they had not then obtained any wealth by the plunder of enemies; the spoils of Midian, being the first considerable acquisition of this kind after their departure from Egypt; and the Midianitish war was an event posterior to the construction of the tabernacle. In regard to commerce, there is no where any mention made, nor the least appearance of any being carried on by the Israelites, whereby they could have obtained such a stock of valuable materials, so soon after their entrance into the wilderness. In their conquest of the land of Canaan, they appear to have sometimes made a considerable booty; but it is not until the reign of David that we observe that profusion of wealth, which

seems astonishing in a period of such remote antiquity. And the abundance of gold and silver which Jerusalem displayed in the succeeding reign of Solomon has staggered the credulity of some readers of the Jewish history. It appears, however, that those metals were at that time very plentiful in Egypt, and several countries of Asia. The history of David's wars and conquests makes it appear that very considerable quantities of gold and silver had, by some means, been introduced into the countries situated between the Euphrates and the Levant Sea; and it seems that this influx of wealth must, (as has already been observed in speaking of the commerce of the ancient world), have been in a great measure the effect of the trade carried on by the Tyrians and Egyptians with the eastern and southern parts of the globe. The commercial connections between Solomon and the Tyrians, with the wealth they produced, have also been already noticed; and it appears from both sacred and profane history, that there was an abundance of both gold and silver in Egypt, in the western parts of Asia on this side of the Euphrates, and in Assyria and Chaldaea, before the conquest of Sardis and Babylon had transferred a great part of the wealth of those countries into the hands of the Persians, who, before that period, do not appear to have possessed any great riches, and only then emerged from poverty and obscurity to wealth and eminence. No historical documents, however, exist, which can give

has any certain information by what channels those vast quantities of gold and silver had entered into the countries just mentioned, and we are equally left in the dark respecting the parts from whence those riches were brought, as there cannot be found in history, either ancient or modern, sacred or profane, the least hint that any mines of those metals existed in any of those countries; nor does history inform us in what part of the world they were found. In this, as in many other historical subjects, we are entirely left to conjecture; and the most probable conjecture is, that the gold and silver of the ancient world was the produce of Africa, where those metals, especially gold, is known to abound, both in the interior and the eastern parts; especially in Monomopata, Monoemugi, and Sofala, which last is by many supposed to be the land of Ophir, to which Solomon's fleets used to sail; although others, with less probability, suppose it to have been the island of Ceylon, or some other part of India, or the oriental islands. In whatever parts of Africa or Asia these metals were found, it is, however, highly probable that they were introduced into Egypt, and the western parts of Asia, by the Arabian, Egyptian, and Tyrian merchants. The Egyptians especially might bring a considerable part of them by their caravans, which, from time immemorial, used to travel into Ethiopia, under which name all the interior and southern parts of Africa were formerly comprehended; as the Ethiopian cara-

vans in like manner traded into Egypt. In the flourishing ages of Greece, gold and silver began to be plentifully introduced into that country, particularly after the conquest of Persia by Alexander, which caused the wealth of that empire to circulate westward. All this while Rome was exceedingly poor, and her warlike citizens possessed a very small quantity of those valuable metals, until the conquest of Macedonia, and the Grecian kingdoms of Asia, caused the riches of the east to flow into her bosom. After the Goths, and other northern nations, began to make successful inroads into the Roman empire, the plunder of its provinces put them in possession of part of its riches, and gold and silver, with which they had before been almost wholly unacquainted, began, by those predatory wars to be introduced among them. After the total subversion of the western empire, those riches which Rome had accumulated by so many centuries of successful rapine, were by degrees diffused over all Europe, and gold and silver were introduced into the regions of the north. The abundance of gold and silver, which, as history informs us, was displayed with profusion, in the palaces, the dress, the arms, &c. of the ancients, seems astonishing, and almost incredible to modern readers; and a person who examines the subject only in a superficial manner, is ready to ask this question—What is become of that immense quantity of those metals which was displayed in certain countries; for example, in

Jerusalem and Judah, in ancient times; and why do we not see the same profusion of them in the present age, especially as the mines of America have produced such abundance? The question is not of a difficult solution, and the answer is obvious. In the ages of antiquity gold and silver were not so extensively diffused, not so generally circulated as at present. In the times here under consideration, and in the countries of which our histories treat, wealth was concentrated within a contracted circle. Egypt, and that small district of Asia which extended from the Levant sea, and the Grecian Archipelago, to the Euphrates, with Assyria and Chaldaea, were the only countries where history, either sacred or profane, mentions any such abundance of gold and silver. Those metals had not then circulated any farther from the countries where they were produced, and they were lodged in a few hands. They remained chiefly among the princes and grandees. Commerce had not at that period branched out into a sufficient number of ramifications to disseminate them among the people at large. This is the reason why such a profusion of them was seen in some particular places, and with some particular persons. We read of the importation of those metals into the Israelitish dominions by Solomon's fleets; but it is highly probable that this trade was monopolized by the crown; and, notwithstanding the extraordinary display of wealth in Jerusalem, we are not to suppose that

so great a quantity of gold and silver was in circulation among the farmers, tradesmen, and mechanics of Israel, as among those of several European countries; nor that the whole quantity accumulated in Solomon's kingdom would bear any comparison with the amount of the circulating cash of England or France. The wealth then accumulated in one narrow corner was afterwards dispersed among the Persians, then among the Greeks and Carthaginians, next among the Romans; and at last throughout all Europe, where no gold or silver had been disseminated before. The treasures, which appeared immense when concentrated within a narrow space, became small when divided into so many portions, and dispersed into so many countries; and this circumstance made gold and silver extremely scarce, which had seemed so plentiful at a far more early period. Gold was, indeed, so scarce, that none was ever coined in England before the eighteenth year of Edward the Third, A. D. 1345; nor any silver but pennies, halfpence, and farthings. It must, however, in all calculations of the value of property, be observed, that the Norman pound was a pound weight of silver, according to Bishop Fleetwood, Sir Robert Atkins, and others; and Mr. Felke says, that this Norman pound was equivalent to 2*l.* 18*s.* 1*d.*; and as the pound of twelve ounces troy was coined into twenty shillings, therefore the intrinsic value of a Norman shilling was almost three times as much as our

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of our shillings, and amounted to 2s. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.; and, A. D. 1346, the Norman pound was reduced to ten ounces troy. In the times of the Norman kings, before Edward III. the only gold coins in this, or, perhaps, any other country of Europe, were the Byzants of Constantinople. The fluctuations in the value of coins renders the computation of the value of property, in former ages, somewhat more difficult and uncertain; but it is evident that the prices of the different articles of European produce had advanced very slowly, and that gold and silver continued extremely scarce until the mines of the new world were opened. The abundant display of those metals, while they were confined to Egypt and the western parts of Asia, and the scarcity of them after they were dispersed into so many different countries, shew that the produce of the mines, in what parts soever they were situated, had not been sufficiently plentiful to counterbalance the effects of their extensive dissemination, or else that commerce had not been sufficiently active and flourishing to create a copious influx of them from the countries where they were produced. Both these causes might concur to produce that scarcity of gold and silver which continued so long in Europe. A third cause might also co-operate in producing this scarcity, beside the extensive dissemination of those metals, and the inadequacy of their production or influx to its supply. It is scarcely to be doubted, that great quantities of treasure

had been buried in the times of those prædatory wars, conquests, and violent revolutions, which so frequently agitated the ancient world; and consequently a considerable part of the gold and silver, so profusely displayed in the early periods of antiquity, had perhaps wholly disappeared.

The discovery of America, and the opening of her mines, had an almost magical effect on the commercial and social system of Europe. The influx of American wealth into Spain and Portugal, which, from thence was, by innumerable channels of commerce, rapidly circulated into the different countries of Europe, produced an immediate diminution in the value of gold and silver, and a proportionate advance in that of European produce. In order to make an estimate of the increased quantity of those metals in Europe, since the opening of the American mines, it is only necessary to observe, that Dr. Robertson, an accurate, as well as elegant historian, says, that, according to a moderate computation, the quantity of gold and silver imported into Spain from America, amounts, on an annual average, from A. D. 1492 to A. D. 1775, to the sum of four millions of pounds sterling, which, during that space of time, makes 1132,000,000*l.* sterling; and that, if we make a calculation of the quantity fraudulently introduced, we may compute the whole quantity of those metals imported into Spain from her colonies, at no less a sum than two thousand mil-

lions. The Abbé Raynal also asserts, that during the period which had elapsed from the discovery of Brasil, to A. D. 1756, an hundred millions of pounds sterling, in gold, had been imported into Lisbon from that colony. The same author also, in giving an example of the dispersion of those metals by commerce, says, that notwithstanding this influx of gold into Portugal, the circulating cash of that kingdom, according to the most accurate calculation, amounted to no more than 833,333*l.* sterling; and that the national debt was, at the same time, 166,666*l.* sterling. It cannot reasonably be supposed that such calculations are exact—that is impossible in the nature of things; but they may, and no doubt are, sufficiently accurate to enable us to make a rough estimate, not only of the vast quantity of gold and silver brought into circulation, since the opening of the American mines, but also of the powers of industry exerted in agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, to attract the wealth of foreign countries; for it is certain that a far greater part of the wealth imported into Spain and Portugal is lodged in England, France, and Holland, than in the countries into which it is first brought.

The influx of American wealth into the old world has also been productive of some alteration in the relative value of gold and silver, the mines of the new world producing a far greater proportion of the latter than of the former metal. This alteration is, therefore, the most ob-

servable in those parts of the world, which are the most influenced by the American trade. The proportional value of gold to silver, was, according to M. l'Abbé Raynal, in ancient Greece, as one to thirteen. In Rome, at the time of the extinction of the republic, as one to ten; and under the imperial government, generally as one to thirteen. In Europe, in the age immediately preceding the discovery of America, as one to twelve. In Japan, at present, as one to eight. In China, as one to ten. In India, as one to eleven; then as one to twelve; thirteen or fourteen in advancing westward; and in Spain, and all the countries of modern Europe, as one to sixteen. This proportional value of those two metals is likely soon to undergo some further alteration, since it appears that the production of gold is increasing, and that of silver considerably on the decline. When the mines of Potosi were first wrought, one hundred weight of ore produced fifty pounds of silver; but at present the same quantity of ore produces only two pounds, a very considerable decrease in the production of that metal; for those mines produced a greater quantity of silver than all the world besides, and it appears that they are now almost exhausted. No other mines likely to counterbalance the failure of those of Potosi have yet been discovered; but, perhaps, some such may yet be found; for mining is the grand object of enterprise in the Spanish colonies, although Dr. Smith says, "that

projects of mining are of all others the most ruinous to a nation or a settlement." The mines of Spanish America are always the property of the discoverer. A certain extent of ground is measured off to him, and the corvees of a certain number of Indians, according to regulations mentioned in speaking on that subject, are allotted to him on application to the government. Mining, however, is so expensive, and its success so uncertain, that numbers are ruined by those undertakings: and the production of silver seems to be exceedingly diminished. Gold, on the contrary, has of late been found in greater abundance than formerly. Towards the latter end of the last century, so great a quantity of that metal was found in some parts of Spanish America as even to astonish those who were the most accustomed to contemplate the rich productions of those countries. In a rising ground, near Pampeluna, in New Grenada, a single labourer has sometimes collected to the amount of a thousand pesos in one day. And a late governor of Santa Fé brought to Spain a lump of pure gold, estimated at the value of 740l. sterling. This largest and finest specimen ever found in the new world, is, according to the testimony of Dr. Robertson, deposited in the royal cabinet of curiosities at Madrid. As to the silver produced in the old continent we know of no very considerable mines of that metal. The silver mines of Styria produce a quantity, which adds considerably to the wealth

of the house of Austria ; but not such a quantity as can make any very perceptible addition to the general mass of silver in circulation : and those of Kongsberg, in Norway, according to Mr. Cox, do no more than clear the expences. Silver mines, undoubtedly, exist in many parts of the globe, and several have been discovered in different countries, but few of them have proved worth the expence of working. These circumstances, collectively considered, authorise a conjecture, that the production of gold will exceed that of silver ; but if the increase in the influx of gold be sufficient to counterbalance the decrease in that of silver, it will, in process of time, somewhat alter their comparative view, without making any alteration in the relative value of money, as proportioned to the prices of the necessaries of life, and the various articles of European property and produce. In this respect the discovery of America is a primary cause which operates on the commercial system with undiminished activity to this very day, and must necessarily continue to exert more or less its influence to the end of time ; for if a period could be supposed to arrive, when all the mines, and every source of the production of American gold and silver should be exhausted, the quantities already produced and thrown into circulation, has given to navigation and commerce an activity, which, according to every probability, will never cease to operate, and produced a spirit of enterprise and mercantile

speculation which will always find innumerable channels of circulation, and continual opportunities of exertion.

The effects of the discovery and colonization of America, are not only eminently remarkable and conspicuous in the political and commercial system of the world, but also clearly perceptible in the state of religion. Christianity had suffered a great defalcation of power and influence by the progress of Mahometanism, and the loss of those rich and extensive countries which composed the empire of the Caliphs. For these losses the Christian interest received a compensation by the conversion of all the northern nations of Europe. After the Turks had established their empire in Asia, they carried their arms into Europe, and their attempt being favored by the continual dissensions subsisting among the Christians, and especially by the inveterate animosity between the Greek and Latin churches, they made gradual encroachments upon Christendom, until at last Constantinople, the impregnable bulwark of Europe against the power of the Caliphate, and afterwards a formidable, and for a long time insurmountable, obstacle to the progress of the Ottoman arms, fell under the dominion of those Mahometans, who at that time appeared formidable to all Europe. The Christian power and interest suffered a considerable diminution by the loss of the eastern empire, and those fertile and flourishing countries of Greece, Macedonia, &c. which then fell

under the Ottoman dominion. Christendom suffered this loss about the middle of the fifteenth century; Constantinople being taken A. D. 1453; and towards the conclusion of the same century received more than a tenfold compensation by the discovery of America, A. D. 1492; and that of a passage to India, round the Cape of Good Hope, scarcely five years afterwards. These discoveries, and the influx of wealth, accompanied with a proportional increase of power, which they have produced, have given to the Christian nations a decided predominance in the political scale of the world; and Christianity has acquired an extension and influence which that system never before possessed. Indeed the enterprising genius of the nations professing Christianity, and their decided superiority, both in arts and arms, above all the other inhabitants of the globe, with several other circumstances collectively considered seem to authorise a conjecture, that the Christian religion may, perhaps, at some future period, be far more extensively propagated than at present. There are even some who imagine that Christianity will at last be the only established and universal religion throughout the whole world; an opinion, which, considering the moral and physical circumstances of mankind, does not, however, seem at present to rest on the basis of probability, although such an event would be far less extraordinary than its first propagation and establishment.

While the Spaniards were employed in projects of discovery, conquest, and colonization, in the new world, which have been followed by consequences so important and interesting to mankind in general, the Portuguese were not less active in projects of a similar nature, and of almost equal importance. Five years after Columbus had discovered America, Vasco di Gama sailed round the Cape of Good Hope, explored the eastern coast of Africa, and arrived safely on the western coast of the peninsula of India, commonly called the Malabar coast. After that successful voyage the Portuguese formed a number of settlements almost quite round the coast of Africa, and made rich and extensive conquests under the conduct of the celebrated Alphonso d'Albuquerque, who took the city of Goa, and conquered the whole coast of Malabar; as also Malacca and Ormus, and made some expeditions up the Red Sea; and after having displayed extraordinary talents, both for war and government, died at Goa, A. D. 1515; leaving the Portuguese in possession of the whole trade of India and Africa, and of a commercial empire unparalleled in the annals of preceding ages. This vast extent of dominion and commerce, which the Portuguese so rapidly acquired, was, however, almost as suddenly lost after the kingdom of Portugal was seized on by Philip the Second, and annexed to the crown of Spain. The Indian trade, and the most valuable Portuguese settlements, fell into the hands of the Hol-

landers, and little more was left to the Portuguese than the city and island of Goa, and some of their settlements on the coast of Africa.

Soon after these great and important discoveries, another scene of a quite different nature, but not of less importance, began to be exhibited in Europe. The enormous power of the church, which had, during so many ages, been increasing, began in many countries to be considered as an usurped dominion over the minds and consciences of men; and the immorality, as well as the tyranny of the clergy, called loudly for a reform. Many ecclesiastics and prelates of the church were convinced that some kind of reform in its discipline was necessary, and wished for a general council to regulate the hierarchy, and to rectify those abuses, which, through the imperfection of human nature, insinuate themselves almost imperceptibly into every system of religion, and every department of human affairs. The work of reformation, however, was not undertaken, for it seldom happens that either a religious or political community willingly sets about reforming itself, until it be driven to adopt such a measure from the pressure of some unforeseen cause. This neglect of reforming those abuses, which gradually arise in religious and political systems, often causes those violent reforms which produce consequences fatal to those systems, and subversive of the established order of things. This was the case of the church in the sixteenth century.

The court of Rome imagining itself secure in the possession of unlimited authority and power, instead of examining the discipline of the church, and endeavouring to correct abuses which might easily have been rectified, strenuously adhered to the measure of crushing every species of opposition by arbitrary power; and the work of reformation, which might have been performed without disturbing the tranquillity of Christendom, was reserved to Martin Luther, a man of a great, daring, and impetuous spirit, whose violent opposition to the arbitrary measures of the Papal See, meeting in collision with the pride and obstinacy of the Court of Rome, produced a division, and effected a breach in the Christian church, which, according to every appearance, will never more be united. The Court of Rome adhering to its arbitrary principles, resolved to silence Luther by positive injunctions, which he, finding himself supported in his measures by a numerous and powerful party, boldly disregarded, and grew more determined in his opposition, in proportion as the Papal See manifested its intention to crush him by violence. Luther, during a long time, professed his readiness to submit to the decisions of the church in a general council, and several of the Christian princes earnestly solicited the Pope to assemble such a council, in order to restore the tranquillity and unity of the church. For some strange reasons, however, those solicitations were not complied with, and the call-

ing of a general council was always continually evaded, until at last the Pope, at the pressing solicitation of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, convoked the council of Trent, A. D. 1545, twenty-eight years after Luther had erected the standard of opposition, when his party, in that long interval of time, had acquired strength, and obtained the support of many princes of Germany, and other great personages; when numbers of people, of every description, adhered to his doctrines, and many ecclesiastics had adopted his opinions and rejected the authority of the Papal See. It was then too late to attempt to make up the breach by the decrees of a council, under the influence of Rome, when so considerable a part of the church already rejected the Papal authority. If a general council had been assembled at the commencement of those disputes, there is little reason to doubt that every point might have been easily settled, and the tranquillity and harmony of the church might have been restored without difficulty. There is every reason to think, that if a similar event should take place at this time in any established church, the moderation and liberality of sentiment which inspire Christians in this enlightened age, would prevent those animosities, which, at the time of the reformation, arose among the opposite parties. That this is something more than conjecture, the events which have so recently taken place in a neighbouring country, where an opposition to the Papal au-

thority had been carried to a greater height, and a more determined hostility to Rome had been manifested, than at the period of the reformation, and yet mutual concessions have made up the breach and conciliated all differences. If the same spirit of moderation had prevailed at the period of the reformation, abuses would undoubtedly have been rectified without producing a separation of the church into different parties. But the circumstances of the present period are different from those of the middle of the sixteenth century. At that time Rome imagined herself all powerful; at present she has learned to make a just estimate of her situation, and knows that her power and influence depends entirely on the princes of her communion; and the sovereign Pontiff is now perfectly convinced that those who profess his religion, do not much regard his authority, and that whatever deference they may have for him as a special director, they will not, in this enlightened age, submit to spiritual usurpation.

The effects of the reformation, like those of almost every other great event, involved a mixture of good and evil, a combination almost inseparable from the present state of humanity. On the one hand, the obstinacy of the opposite parties, who, instead of being actuated by Christian charity, and endeavouring to conciliate differences, continually laboured to widen the breach, and render it irreparable; excited the most deadly animosities, attended by the most

fatal consequences. Temporal considerations, as is commonly the case in religious contests, covered themselves with "spiritual pretexts; and whatever might be the intentions of some pious and disinterested individuals on both sides, who were actuated by a sincere zeal for what they thought to be the true religion of Christ, many of each party, while they made the glory of God, and the purity of religion, the ostensible object of their pursuit, acted from the impulse of very different motives. The leading members of the reformation were desirous to shake off the yoke of Rome, while that court was resolved to use every violent method to reduce them to subjection. From this intemperance of party zeal, stimulated by avarice and ambition, consequences shocking to retrospection ensued. Rome thundered out her anathemas, and kindled the flames of persecution, in order to extirpate, or at least to reduce to subjection those who opposed her authority; and the reformed party too often retaliated when they found themselves in possession of sufficient power. A scene of persecution displayed itself in almost every part of Europe, and the Protestants, divided into several different sects, persecuted one another, in some instances, with an animosity equal to that which they manifested against papal usurpation. The religious wars of Germany and France, as also the revolt of England, in the reign of the unfortunate Charles I. are melancholy proofs of the fanaticism of the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, and of that spirit of persecution so contrary to Christianity, which actuated the different sects of Christians. On contemplating the effects of the reformation, in another point of view, we shall, however, perceive, that this remarkable event, after the first commotions it occasioned had subsided, contributed in no small degree to the improvement of the human mind, not only by setting it free from the uncontrollable authority formerly exercised over it by spiritual judges, but also by the profound and learned investigations which arose from those religious disputes; as in every subject of disquisition the collision of opposite opinions strike out new sparks of genius, and affords new lights to the inquisitive mind. Difficult investigations of complicated subjects, by exercising the mental faculties, ripen and invigorate the understanding. Things are viewed in new lights in which they would never have been seen, but they had not been brought forward to distinct inspection by this kind of mental process, and appear with a train of dependent images, with which they would not otherwise have been seen in connection. Whenever any question appears so interesting as to become a subject of general investigation and enquiry; reading and conversation furnish new ideas, which reflection arranges and combines. Thus are new combinations formed in the mind, by which the sphere of human knowledge is enlarged, and its objects multiplied. The watch-

ful eye of opposition, ever prone to censure the conduct, and expose the faults of adversaries, also rendered the clergy of the different parties and sects of Christians more circumspect and regular in their morals than they had been before those divisions took place. It was, indeed, absolutely necessary, that the clergy of every denomination of Christians should regulate their moral conduct in consistency with their sacred character, in order to avoid exposing themselves, and their party, to the contempt and censure of their opponents; a degree of circumspection, of which they would not, perhaps, have so sensibly felt the necessity, if there had been no adversary, whose censure they might apprehend. And it is a fact, which scarcely any one will call in question, that the clergy of the whole Christian church are both more learned, and more pious than they would have been if those divisions had never taken place. Difference in religious opinions, among men, is a circumstance which appears inevitable. Those who never think, may, indeed, silently and supinely acquiesce in any opinion proposed to their belief; and the bulk of mankind assent to doctrines, which they cannot with propriety be said to believe, because they have never once bestowed a thought on them, nor ever endeavoured to ascertain their truth; but it appears absolutely impossible, that thinking persons should all think alike on any complicated subject, especially on subjects of abstract speculation, which cannot

be brought under the inspection of the senses. The diversity of opinions on the subject of religion, could not, however, be productive of any bad effects, if men, in exercising freedom of conscience themselves, would allow to others the same privilege; but it is a melancholy circumstance, that the diabolical spirit of intolerance, and religious persecution, has not been peculiar to one single party or sect, but has insinuated itself into almost every system of religion. Those who most of all declaim against persecution, when they themselves are the objects of it, seldom make any scruple of exercising it against others; and whenever they see themselves possessed of power, soon find a pretext for imposing those restraints upon others of which they themselves so bitterly complain. But, however, men may deceive themselves, all pretences of advancing the glory of God, or the interests of religion, by intolerant measures, are nugatory. God knows the weakness and incapacity of his finite creatures, the nature and extent of our intellectual powers, and the contracted limits of human comprehension, and looks with a compassionate eye on those errors which originate in a mistake of the judgment only, and not in any perverseness of the will. Ought then presumptuous man to snatch the balance of justice from the hand of his Maker, and exercise cruelty and oppression in the name of the God of mercy and love; and ought not the arrogant usurpers of the divine prerogative

to apprehend the most dreadful punishments? The present age, however, happily displays a prospect very different from the scenes exhibited in the days of fanaticism and religious bigotry; and the different sects and denominations of Christians, if they disagree in the minutiae of opinion, or the ceremonial part of religion, agree in a liberality of sentiment, and a spirit of religious toleration, unparalleled in any former period. There are few Christian countries where persecution is at present carried to any great extent, and where it is not yet entirely extinguished; it is, however, rapidly on the decline. That we may soon see its entire extinction, is, I fully persuade myself, as much your wish as that of

Sir, your's, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

SIR,

WE have now continued our review, and extended our reflections, through the most striking scenes of history, and drawing very near to our own times, those we have now to contemplate, although less extraordinary, are not less interesting.

Some the commencement of the world no period has been so eminently distinguished by a succession of great and important events, as that which elapsed from about A. D. 1440, to A. D. 1560, which includes the invention of printing,

the capture of Constantinople, the discovery of America, and of the passage to India; the conquest of Mexico, Peru, and other parts of the New World, and the opening of the rich mines of those countries by the Spaniards; the conquest of Goa, with the coast of Malabar, as well as of Ormus and Malacca by the Portuguese; with the establishment of innumerable colonies in the west by the former, and in the east, and on the coast of Africa, by the latter of these two nations; the reformation also of religion, and the aggrandisement of the House of Austria, by the union of so many European states, under the dominion of Charles the Fifth, with the augmentation of its wealth, by the acquisition of the riches of the New World. Each of those great events were followed by a train of consequences which influence, in the most decided manner, the condition of mankind in our days, and will continue to have the same effect in future ages. To these might also be added, a number of discoveries and improvements in navigation, commerce, philosophy, arts, sciences, and manufactures, which were made in the period above-mentioned, and which, although of less importance than the great transactions and events which distinguish that period above all others, as the age of enterprise, adventure, and improvement, have not been without their effects on the general system. Gunpowder had been invented by a German priest before the middle of the fourteenth century;

but the perfection of that invention, and its various applications, were the work of a later period; and it was not until the end of the fifteenth, or the beginning of the sixteenth century that fire-arms, of different sorts, were brought to what the moderns would call a tolerable degree of perfection. Some are willing to believe, that fire-arms were first used by the English, under Edward the Third, at the battle of Cressy, but this fact does not appear to be well authenticated; nor is it more certainly known, where, or at what time, cannon were first used, although it is almost beyond the possibility of doubt, that gunpowder was in use among the Indians and Chinese many centuries before it was known to the Europeans. This discovery is, however, an important and interesting subject in military history, as it has effected a total change in the military art, and in almost all the operations of war. The invention of gunpowder has given occasion to a great deal of declamation against the introduction of so destructive a material; but it is certain, that battles, sieges, &c. have been attended with far less effusion of blood since the invention of gunpowder, and the use of fire-arms, than they commonly were in former ages. The perusal of the military history of the ancients will establish the truth of this observation beyond all possibility of contradiction or doubt.

The events which have taken place since the sixteenth century, although many of them have

been of a nature sufficiently important and interesting, have not been productive of effects of such magnitude and extent, nor had so decided and extensive an influence on the general system of human affairs as those which had just then taken place. The space of time which has elapsed since that period affords a pleasing view of the extension of commerce, the diffusion of wealth, the advancement of civilization, the decline of religious persecution, the introduction of humanity and liberality of sentiment, the rapid progress of science and literature, and the general advancement of every branch of human knowledge. This general scene of improvement has been the necessary consequence of the events which took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and evidently shews the potency of those causes which then began to operate, and of which the influence will never be extinguished, nor the effects exhausted.

The transactions which have taken place among the European nations, since the middle of the sixteenth century, are related by a great number of historians with a degree of accuracy, evidently surpassing any thing of the kind to be met with in the histories of preceding times. The limits here prescribed do not admit of even an enumeration of particulars, and any thing of the kind would be useless. To form a just idea of the present state of the world, it is necessary to read, with attention, the best historians who treat of the affairs of the two last centuries. In

a general review, it is not amiss to observe, that as we have already remarked the aggrandisement of the house of Austria, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, we cannot but observe the decline of the Spanish branch of that house in the latter part of the same century, by the revolt of the Low Countries, which exhausted the resources of Spain, and brought into existence a new, and, (far a long time), a formidable maritime power. This revolt was the consequence of the violent and arbitrary measures of Philip II. The seven united provinces, from a valuable appendage to the crown of Spain, were converted into an hostile republic, the most troublesome and inveterate enemy, as well as a dangerous rival of the maritime power of that monarchy. The naval force of Spain, the most formidable of all Europe, received also a fatal blow in the defeat of the invincible Armada, destined by Philip for the invasion of England, A.D. 1588. The depression of Spain was completed by the aggrandisement of France, and the latter became so powerful in the reign of Louis the Fourteenth as to threaten the subjugation of Europe, and to aim at universal monarchy. The balance of power has, however, during the space of two centuries, been so well understood, and so firmly established, as to render those objects, in all probability, for ever unattainable by any power whatever. The aggrandisement of Russia, and the advancement of that empire in arts, sciences, and civilization,

as well as in naval and military strength and political importance, by the genius and efforts of the immortal Peter the Great, seconded by the exertions of a succession of great sovereigns, especially the illustrious Catharine the Second, is a striking circumstance in the history of the eighteenth century, and affords a pleasing prospect to those who delight in contemplating the progress of civilization, and the improvement of the human species. Europe could not, without astonishment, behold a large and elegant metropolis, embellished with magnificent structures, and in every respect suitable for the residence of a brilliant court, rising up in the dreary morasses of Ingria, and the swampy banks of the Neva, covered with splendid palaces, and converted into a terrestrial paradise. The city of Petersburg exhibits the most striking example of human industry and exertion any where to be found, and will be a lasting monument of the enterprising and improving genius of Peter the Great.

Among the remarkable occurrences of these latter times, the present generation has seen a new empire burst into existence beyond the Atlantic, which may perhaps, one day equal in power, extent, and population, any of the ancient empires, that of Rome not excepted. The establishment of the American republic is an event which must, in succeeding ages, be productive of very important consequences. It is beyond the reach of human foresight exactly to

ascertain the nature, or determine, with any tolerable degree of precision, the extent of those remote consequences, although some of them appear to flow so necessarily from the state of the American world, as to afford grounds of conjecture which can hardly admit of mistake,

There is not the least reason to doubt but the Anglo-Americans will, in process of time, extend their empire over the whole continent of America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, and from the farthest habitable regions of the North to the Gulph of Mexico; but whether their dominions will continue to constitute one vast republic, or whether they will be split into a number of independent, unconnected, and hostile states, is what cannot be predicted. It is impossible to foresee what revolutions may take place in the trans-atlantic quarter of the globe. In the old continent we have seen empires rise, flourish, decline, and sink into non-existence; monarchies have been changed into republics, and republics into monarchies; and, it is hardly reasonable to suppose, that America will for ever be exempted from those commotions which have so frequently agitated the other quarters of the globe. After the lapse of some centuries America will no longer be what it is at present. The immense wildernesses of the interior will then be all in a high state of cultivation. Its vast uninhabited tracts will be overspread with a crowded population, and filled with villages and populous

towns. America will then be what Europe is now; and who can foresee what revolutions may take place; what factious demagogues may usurp the sovereign authority; what new forms of government may be established; what new republics or monarchies may arise? These events are concealed in the eternal prescience of the Deity, and the volume of futurity is a sealed book. It is, however, difficult to suppose that the North American empire will, after the lapse of some centuries, remain united in one federal government as at present.

Without expatiating too far in the boundless regions of conjecture, the natural course of things, and the necessary connection of moral circumstances, will authorise the prediction of some consequences which must infallibly ensue from that immense population, extent, and aggrandisement, to which the North American empire, whether united or divided, will one day most certainly attain. It has been already observed, and indeed the circumstance is too obvious to escape observation, that the influx of gold and silver from the mines of the new world has, by diminishing the relative value of those metals, the standard by which the value of every other kind of property is estimated, had a more decided and visible influence on the commercial system than any other event which has ever occurred in human affairs. This influx of wealth, the production of the American mines, which, from the ports of Lisbon and Cadiz, is circulated

throughout all Europe, and most of the countries where the Europeans have colonies or connections, is an active cause continually operating on commerce in all its numerous and ramified details, and influencing the value of European produce and property. The activity of this potent and continually operating cause will, according to every observable appearance, continue as long as the world itself shall exist; but although its influence will, in all probability, never be extinguished, the time will undoubtedly come when it must undergo a very great change in its direction. When the North American continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Polar Circle to the Mexican Gulph, shall be crowded with an active, industrious, and numerous people, flourishing in arts and sciences, commerce and manufactures, there is no doubt but it will attract by commerce, or, perhaps, appropriate to itself by conquest, the mines of Mexico, and very probably a great part of the productions of those of Peru and 'Terra Firma. This arrangement will certainly, one day or other, take place, although it be now beyond the reach of conjecture to fix the period when so important a change in the political and commercial system will arrive, or to foresee what causes may either accelerate or retard its approach.

This great and important change will, however, be gradually introduced, as the causes from which it must originate will gradually ac-

quire strength and efficacy ; for the increase of population, the establishment of manufactures, &c. in the North American continent must be a work of time, perhaps of some centuries ; and its advancement or retardment will depend on a variety of moral and physical circumstances. It is, however, easy to foresee, that whenever that period shall arrive, the influx of gold and silver into Europe being considerably diminished, the consequence must be a gradual depression of the value of European property, unless some other cause, at present impossible to foresee, shall effectually counteract the influence of this decrease in the influx of American wealth into the old continent.

Another striking, and to an Englishman a not less pleasing circumstance, in the history of these latter times, is the rapid and extraordinary increase of the commerce and naval power of Great Britain, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, began to rise from insignificance into importance, until it attracted the notice and admiration of Europe by the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The marine of this country has been, ever since that period, in a progressive state of improvement ; but it is only since the peace of Aix la Chapelle that it has become so formidable as to be able to bid defiance to the united naval strength of the whole world. The natural consequence of this naval superiority is the uncontrollable sovereignty of the seas, with settlements in every part of the globe, and a commerce more

extensive than that of any other nation. The most considerable part of the trade to the East-Indies and China is now in the hands of the English; and the East-India Company is in possession of a territory of greater extent than the united kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. According to Major Rennel, the possessions of the English in Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa, contain no less than an hundred and fifty thousand square miles; and the district of Benares twelve thousand more; so that the British empire in India contains an hundred and sixty-two thousand square miles, which is thirty thousand square miles more than the aggregate content of Great Britain and Ireland; and its population amounts to nearly eleven millions; besides a number of detached forts and settlements not included in this calculation. Without indulging any sentiment of national partiality or prejudice, it cannot but be evident to every observer, whether friend or enemy, that Great Britain at this time exhibits a spectacle of naval strength and commercial opulence, to which the world has never afforded any parallel.

The last important and interesting scene which has taken place on the moral theatre of the world, is the French revolution, of which the recency and general notoriety of circumstances preclude the necessity of investigation or comment. It may only in general terms be observed, that it has been an extraordinary and unprecedented attempt to overturn the Christian reli-

gion, and the political system of Europe; and its termination has not been less remarkable than the project was singular. After a long struggle between infidelity and revealed religion, in which the former had, during a long time, a visible ascendancy, the contest has, through the good sense of the nation and its rulers, acting under the direction of Divine Providence, terminated in the triumph and re-establishment of Christianity, upon the broad and rational basis of universal liberty of conscience. We have seen the commencement and the termination of a war which ensued in consequence of this extraordinary revolution; a war which ought to be marked with letters of blood in the annals of France and Austria, which has augmented the national debt of England to an unexampled amount, and, like many other remarkable occurrences, has displayed in the most conspicuous and striking point of view the shortness of all political foresight and the extreme uncertainty of all human expectancy. No war, perhaps, has ever occurred in which so many and such bloody battles have been fought, and so many extraordinary and unexpected vicissitudes have happened in so short a space of time, as in the war between France and the combined powers. The exertions of the republic have been without parallel in the history of nations; and notwithstanding the victories, the conquests, and triumphs of Rome, every one who is conversant in the history of the

Romans, will find himself obliged to confess, that the most extraordinary military exertions of that celebrated people never equalled those of the French republic, nor produced such great and decisive effects in so short a space of time. While the republic, however, has been gathering its laurels it has bled at every pore, and the glorious names of Mantua and Marengo cannot dry up the tears of the widows and orphans of France.

While the French republic was exciting the admiration of Europe by a scene of unparalleled exertion, Great Britain was in no less a degree signalizing herself as the only power able to resist its tremendous efforts. At that momentous crisis, Britain exhibited herself the bulwark of Europe, and displayed in a distinguished manner her liberality of sentiment and her spirit of universal benevolence, in the generous protection and support of the persecuted clergy of a foreign country, and of a different communion; a circumstance which redounds as much to her glory, as the conquest of Egypt, the forcing of the passage of the Sound, or any other of her great military or naval achievements.

No wars which have ever happened, nor indeed any political measures in which this or any other nation ever engaged, have, perhaps, more forcibly attracted the public attention, or given rise to a greater diversity of opinion, than the two memorable contests with the American colonies and the French republic. Each, in its

turn, was debated in the British Parliament, with all the dexterity of argument of which the human understanding is capable, and with all the energy and floridity of style which the oratorical art can display. Burke, Pitt, Fox, and Sheridan, with many others of our British orators, have disputed the prize with Cicero and Demosthenes, and the rest of the celebrated orators of Greece and Rome, whose speeches have always been esteemed master-pieces of eloquence, and the standard of rhetorical perfection.

It was not, however, in the senate alone that those important points were discussed. The spirit of political investigation insinuated itself into every corner, and agitated the public mind beyond all example. In every country, and on almost every occasion, the people, although possessing neither the abilities nor information necessary to qualify them for examining the conduct of those in power, are ready to censure their measures, and to ascribe the existence of every political evil to the misconduct of administration. Those who rashly condemn the conduct of their rulers ought seriously to consider the difficulties of their situation, arising from the perpetual vicissitudes of political affairs, which depend on so multifarious a train of complicated and changeable circumstances, sometimes increasing, sometimes counteracting one another's influence, so as to produce consequences which no human prudence can foresee.

If the multitude were capable of investigating the unforeseen difficulties daily arising in political affairs, and of making a just and impartial estimate, they would not so hastily condemn the measures of government; and a candid enquirer, instead of rashly censuring the conduct of ministers, would consider the difficulties of their situation, and, perhaps, discover the impracticability of his own groundless and visionary theories.

The increasing prevalence of revolutionary principles, and the traitorous machinations of the jacobinical party at home, laid the British government under the necessity of breaking off all communication with a country where the revolutionizing system carried all before it, and domineered with an uncontrollable sway. Upon the whole, when the political circumstances of Europe, at that momentous crisis, are duly considered, the situation of Great Britain appears to have been extremely critical; and candid impartiality, uninfluenced by passion or prejudice, or by any bias towards either exculpation or censure, must confess that her ministers stood in a predicament wholly unprecedented, and difficult beyond all example.

Those who are prone to censure too hastily the conduct of other men, in difficult and important affairs, ought to consider, that it is absolutely uncertain whether different measures would have been more successful, or have produced greater advantages. The certainty of our

knowledge, in regard to the effects of moral causes, and of the consequences of human conduct, depends only on experience. We can see the consequences of what has been done, but cannot perceive those which might have proceeded from a contrary line of conduct. The consequences of moral actions are known only after the experiment has been made; but those of untried theories exist only in the imagination. The consequences of the war with France are known, but those which would have proceeded from adhering to a pacific system can never be known, because the experiment was not made; and therefore the grand question of the propriety or impropriety of the war must, like many other political questions, as well as several relating to private life, remain for ever undecided.*

It cannot be denied, that the national debt of this country has been increased to an unparalleled magnitude in consequence of the extraordinary expenditure incurred in that war; and the taxes have been necessarily increased in proportion to the pressure of the national burden, compounded of the interest of that debt, and the current public expenditure, both increased in proportion to the national exigencies. In speculative theory this is a most formidable evil, which, after an accurate examination of circumstances, will not, however, be found to exist in

* It should be observed, that these letters were written in the short interval of peace between the last and present war.

reality to that alarming magnitude in which it appears in a superficial view.

Taxation is a thing universally murmured against, and yet but little understood. The disaffected and the ignorant of every country have considered it as a grievance, and the factious demagogues and ring-leaders of sedition have never failed to make the burden of the taxes a subject of declamation, in order to impose upon the ignorant multitude, and to cover their own sinister designs with the specious pretext of redressing public grievances. It is an undeniable fact, that taxes have an immediate influence on the articles of the public consumption, whether of necessity, or conveniency, or luxury; for the value of the whole national consumption is always augmented by the aggregate sum of the interest of the national debt, and the annual expenditure. This augmentation of the value of the national consumption is the principal and most determinate effect of taxation. The supposition that high taxes impoverish a nation is a mistake. Whatever taxes are levied in any country, if they be expended in the national produce, cannot impoverish it; they only cause a more vigorous circulation, as the money thus levied in the country flows back into it by a thousand different channels. This is in a great measure the case with England. In peace and war the bulk of the money raised by taxation flows back into the country. The produce of our own country, and its colonies, furnish most of

the articles used in the equipment and victualling of our fleets and armies. The salaries of almost all who hold employments under government are expended at home, in some part of the British dominions; and the building of our ships, as well as the manufacturing of arms, &c. employs numbers of our mechanics. It is true, we import masts, cordage, hemp, iron, and several other articles used in the construction of vessels; but this contributes to stimulate trade, and create a market for our own produce and manufactures, which foreign nations could not afford to take off our hands, if we in return did not take a proportionate quantity of theirs.

The effects of taxes, in advancing the prices of the articles of consumption cannot be denied; but the nation is not on that account any poorer, nor the lower classes of the people more oppressed; for the value of produce, and the price of labour, will always advance in proportion. This delineation of the case is obviously founded in reason, and its truth is confirmed by experience; for it is an unquestionable fact, that since the existence of a great national debt, and the increase of taxes, the middling and lower classes of the people live much better than they did before these circumstances took place.

It has already been observed, and is, indeed, too obvious a fact to escape observation, that the influx of gold and silver from America was the principal and primary cause of the extraordinary advancement which has, since the dis

covery of that continent, taken place in the value of European produce, which, as it must necessarily ever be the case, advanced in proportion as the increase of the quantity of gold and silver caused a diminution in the relative value of those metals. From this circumstance it is evident, that if the quantity of circulating cash were doubled, the value of property, in general, would also be doubled; but if it were diminished, in that or any other ratio, the general value of property would decrease in the same proportion; the activity of commerce is affected not only by the existing quantity of money in circulation, but also by any thing used to represent it; and established credit operates in this respect in the same manner as circulating cash, of which, not only the public funds, of which the securities are transferable, but also every kind of paper currency is a substitute and representation, and all contribute to facilitate commerce, and to stimulate exertion.

It has by some been remarked, that the national debt of Great Britain amounting to so vast a sum, and consequently her annual expenditure being very great, a larger sum must be raised by taxation in this country than in any other of the same population and extent. Admitting this to be true, it is, however, a truth not less worthy of observation, that the expenditure of a nation, as well as its ability to support this expenditure, depends on its wealth, and not on the population, much less on the extent of

its territories. The reason why the expences of Great Britain are greater than those of other nations is evidently because she is more wealthy. In countries where money is scarce, and trade languishing, every thing is cheap, the stipend of the soldier is low, as well as the wages of the mechanic and the labourer; the salaries annexed to public employments of every description are small, and every article of the national expences is low in proportion. In countries where one shilling will go as far as three in England, the same civil and military establishments may be kept up at one third of the expence requisite for that purpose in this country; but one shilling paid in taxes by the subject is as heavily felt as three shillings by an Englishman. This is exemplified in the most luminous manner by the respective revenue and expenditure of England and Russia. The revenue of the latter is, by Mr. Cox, one of the most intelligent and observing of our modern travellers, and a judicious writer, estimated at the amount of 6,000,000l. sterling, and cannot be computed at more than seven millions sterling. Yet, with this revenue, which does not amount to one fourth of the annual revenue of Great Britain, Russia is able to maintain an army of about 400,000 cavalry and infantry, exclusive of her fleets, which are not inconsiderable; and not only to maintain a preponderating influence in the political balance of Europe, and to carry on the operations of war and government with energy, and on the

most extensive scale, but also to expend immense sums on the erection of magnificent edifices, and to exhibit an appearance of public splendor at least equal to that of any court in Europe; besides having enough left for the reward of merit, the promotion of arts and sciences, and literature, and every other purpose deserving the attention of government. If the produce of the farmer, the wages of the artizan and the labourer, and the stipend of the soldier, were as high, or, in other words, if money were as plentiful in Russia as in England, the government of that empire would be obliged to levy four or five times as great a sum upon its subjects as it does at present, and still be scarcely able to cover its expenditure, and to make such wonderful exertions as it has frequently made in the pursuits both of war and peace.

From the foregoing considerations, it evidently appears, even beyond a possibility of contradiction or dispute, that the enormous height of the taxes of Great Britain are a necessary consequence of her immense wealth, and that no people whatever have so little right to murmur against their taxes as the British subjects, because none are so able to pay them: and also, because Britons, in return for the money they pay for the support of their government, enjoy a security, and protection of person and property, unknown under any of the ancient, and equal at least, if not superior, to any advantages of the kind to be met with under any of the modern

governments. It is also to be observed, that the British subjects, not to mention the privilege they enjoy of imposing their own taxes by the voice of their representatives, are, in a great measure, left to their own choice to determine how much they will pay; for, excepting the land-tax, which is unavoidable, the other taxes being mostly laid upon the articles of consumption, or of optional use, the subject may at any time, by diminishing his consumption, or leaving off the use of certain conveniencies, or luxuries, diminish the amount of his taxes, which could not be done under the system of capita-tion assessment, instituted among the Romans, and in use in some modern nations. And if the national debt were extinguished, and taxes could be abolished, it is questionable whether the country would, on that account, be much richer. The value of the national produce and national property would be diminished; but the lower classes of the community would not derive any advantage from that circumstance, as the price of labour would suffer a proportionate decrease.

It would therefore seem, that as the money levied by taxation, if spent in the produce of the country, flows back to the sources from which it was originally drawn, and as that part of it which is spent in foreign produce tends to give activity and vigour to commerce, a great national debt, and the increase of taxes, which must be the necessary consequence of the pay-

ment of a great annual interest, are evils of a much less magnitude than they are generally represented. Perhaps it might, upon a critical and accurate investigation, be made to appear, that the principal and almost the only real and considerable evil of taxes consists in their effects on home produce and manufactures, by their irresistible tendency to advance the price of labour in proportion to the advancement of the prices of provisions; for it is an obvious case, that the artizan or manufacturer, who cannot while working up his article, support himself for less than half a crown per diem, will not be able to afford the manufactured commodity at so low a price as he who can maintain himself for eighteen pence or a shilling, supposing they both pay the same price for the raw material, and consequently, when the goods are brought to market, the latter will, by underselling, take away the trade of the former, who cannot stand against such a competitor, unless he can counterbalance the disadvantage by the superiority of workmanship; or else, by the possession of a large capital, and a well established trade, be enabled to carry on his business on a more commodious and extensive scale, and consequently to trade for less clear profit, on account of the extensiveness of his sale. As similar circumstances must operate in a similar manner on the labours of a million of workmen, as on those of a single individual, the most dangerous consequence, therefore, to be apprehended from high

taxes, is, that the nation which is highly taxed, should, by reason of the advanced price of the necessaries of life, be unable to sell its manufactures and other exports at the same price in foreign markets as other nations among whom the rate of living is lower. • Whenever two trading nations, thus circumstanced, are rivals in the same kind of manufactures, and export the same species of merchandize, that whose workmen cannot be maintained but at an expensive rate, will be undersold in the foreign markets by its rival, whose artizans and manufactures can be more cheaply supported; unless, as in the case of individuals, the disadvantage be counterbalanced by superior skill in workmanship, or by a greater capital, and more extensive trade. This is at present the case with Great Britain; her manufacturers work at a higher rate than those of other countries, but they do a great quantity of work; and do it better, and for this reason, her manufactures are held in great esteem, and fetch good prices in foreign countries. The commerce of Britain is also supported by an immense capital, and carried on upon a more extensive scale than that of any other nation. She has likewise this advantage, that if the high price of labour obliges her to sell her productions and manufactures to foreigners at a higher rate, her opulence and extensive trade enable her to afford them good prices for such of their commodities as she imports for her own consumption.

That a great national debt, and high taxes, its inseparable concomitants, originate chiefly from the expences inturred by war is an undeniable fact; and these are generally esteemed the most pernicious consequences which a system of hostility produces. If, therefore, it be made to appear that these are nominal, rather than real evils, or at least evils of a much less magnitude than is commonly supposed, the question will naturally be asked,—How then can war be so dreadful a calamity as it is generally represented? This question, however, might, with great propriety, be answered by asking another to the following purport:—Is the effusion of human blood a trivial matter? the destruction of the human species a concern of little importance? are the tears of widows and orphans trifles, which merit not attention? or is the account which every one, who commences and promotes hostilities, merely from motives of avarice, ambition, or self aggrandisement, must render to that Supreme Judge, who, “at the hand of every man’s brother, will require the life of man,” to be esteemed a subject of trifling consideration?

In a political, as well as a moral view, the evils of war are far from being inconsiderable. The wealth and prosperity of a state must necessarily be increased in proportion as its subjects are exercised in useful and profitable employments; and the riches of every community will be augmented in proportion to the number

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of its members who are thus employed. It must then certainly be a deplorable misfortune to mankind, that in every period, from the earliest ages, so considerable a number of the most active and useful subjects of every state should have been employed in no other business than the destruction of their fellow-creatures. To the loss of so much useful labour, which might have been of the greatest benefit to the community, may also be added, that of great quantities of provisions, &c. which are often destroyed by the enemy, or by being transported from place to place, and laid up for a long time in magazines, are rendered useless, and consequently are not consumed but wasted.

In perusing the ensanguined page of history, the feeling reader cannot but lament the horrible effects of those wars which have so often desolated the finest countries, and involved numbers of unhappy sufferers in a widely extended scene of calamity. It seems, however, on considering the circumstances of the world, and the imperfections of human nature, that frequent hostilities are an evil inseparable from the present state of humanity. In particular states and communities there exists a legislative authority which enacts laws and regulations, in order to restrain the inordinate passions and reconcile the jarring interests of their members, and likewise an executive power to enforce obedience. It is evident, that without such restraints society could not subsist. But when

disputes arise between nations, there is no supreme tribunal on earth to which they can appeal. The decision must consequently be by the sword.

It appears therefore, that wars may be ranked among those mysterious dispensations of Providence, by which the restless passions of mankind, in their baneful effects, produce their own punishment. However, as war is so deplorable a calamity, and the wanton destruction of the human species, a crime for which the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, the Creator and Judge of man, has expressly declared, that he will not fail to take vengeance, nothing but imperious necessity can justify human beings in the infliction of so dreadful an evil on their fellow-mortals. Present war must have for its object the insurance of future tranquillity; and if its operation be offensive, its principle must be defensive, or else it is unjust.

The funding system is one of those discriminating features which distinguish the modern system of politics from that of the ancients, and is, in many respects, far preferable. In the ancient system, both the ordinary and extraordinary expences were collected at the time when they were wanted, and, on great emergencies, fell heavy upon the subjects, who were often ill prepared to meet those extraordinary and unexpected requisitions. Sometimes it was found impossible to raise the sums requisite for the service of the state; and we frequently hear of

armies having been disbanded in the most critical moment of public exigency, and even on the eve of victory and conquest, for want of the means of supporting and paying them. The national treasures, when thus collected, were also liable to be seized by usurpers and rebels, of which we have several instances in ancient history. These, and many other evils, are either wholly removed, or at least exceedingly diminished, by the funding system, which establishes a regular mode of proportioning the national revenue to the public expenditure, and providing for any extraordinary exigency of the state, without making oppressive, exorbitant, and unexpected demands on the subject, with which it might, perhaps, be in some cases, impossible to comply.

It may be objected, that the natural operation of the funding system is to impose the increasing burdens on posterity. This objection, however, loses all its force, when it is considered, that together with the national debt, the greatest national advantages are also transmitted to succeeding generations. In conjunction with an increased public debt, each existing generation transmits to that succeeding it the inheritance of a mass of political and social advantages, a country more highly cultivated, a commerce more extended, arts and sciences more improved, society more civilized, and the possession of all these blessings secured by an excellent constitution, founded on the surest princi-

ples of public justice and rational liberty. On proceeding to so noble an inheritance, posterity will not murmur at finding it incumbered with a mortgage, which does not diminish its real value, and which has been contracted with a view of improving the patrimony.

As the funding system is peculiar to modern finance, and was unknown to the ancients, so has the balance of power, ever since the extraordinary aggrandisement of the house of Austria, under Charles V. been a leading consideration in the general system of European politics, and an object for which oceans of blood have been spilt. Thousands, and it may, without exaggeration, even be said, millions of human victims have been sacrificed on the altar of the phantom, which seems now to have disappeared. The smaller, and, indeed, some of the greater powers, appear to have little influence in the political system; and Great Britain, France, and Russia seems to be the only three powers, which, in time to come, will cast the political scale and determine the fate of the world, until the North American empire shall acquire the same ascendancy in the new world, which those powers appear likely to possess on the old continent.

As those already mentioned are some of the most conspicuous features in the political aspect of the world, so does the rapid progress of civilization, and all its appendages, make a distinguished figure in the picture of modern society. We have already seen how a complicated train

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of causes have operated, through a long succession of ages, to advance or retard the civilization and improvement of the human species. The progress of liberty, the advancement of knowledge, the invention or improvement of arts, sciences, and manufactures, the extension of commerce, the discovery of America, and the influx of wealth from that quarter, constitute a combination of causes, which, by a reciprocal and united operation, have produced this great effect, the civilization of modern Europe.

One visible and necessary consequence of this general civilization, is the diffusion of opulence, and consequently of luxury, among the people. The prevalence of luxury, among all ranks of people, in modern Europe, has furnished an ample subject of declamation to self-authorised reformers, moralists, and petty politicians. In reality, it is, however, no more than a natural consequence of the advancement of civilization, and the acquisition of riches, in co-operation with that universal principle of human nature which excites men to enjoy what they possess. Those declaimers remind us, that luxury caused the downfall of the greatest empires of the ancient world, and from thence would infer, that its effects will be the same on the nations of modern Europe; but it does not appear to have been the luxury of the people, but that of an effeminate court, which occasioned or at least accelerated the fall of the Babylonian, Persian,

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some other monarchies. That species of luxury which is diffused throughout a whole nation, and exists among the middle and lower classes of the people, has not that fatal tendency; but is, on the contrary, the principal support of trade and manufactures, and the grand stimulus of national and individual industry.

There is also another essential difference between the governments and political systems of the ancients and those of the moderns; the former, for the most part, owed their opulence, as well as their aggrandisement, to conquest; and when the military enthusiasm, to which they owed their greatness, had subsided, they often fell a prey to the first barbarous invader. The nations of modern Europe, on the contrary, owe their wealth, and most of their advantages, to commerce; and if luxury produce ignorance among a people, whose genius and politics are entirely military, it excites industry, and rouses exertion, in a commercial nation. It is not luxury, therefore, but supineness and indolence, which are baneful to a state. The luxury and splendour of a court are not incompatible with an attention to public affairs; nor the luxury of individuals inconsistent with the management of their private concerns. The popular declaimers against the political and moral vices of the times would do well to consider, that as luxury cannot properly be defined any thing else than an extravagant expenditure, too great for the circum-

stances of the party on whom the imputation is fixed, it is not easy to determine what is luxury in different situations of life; for what is luxury in one, is bare convenience in another. Luxury always begins where convenience ends, but it is often difficult to fix the line of demarcation.

After contemplating the state of that part of the moral system, with which we are the most acquainted, and in which we are the most interested, if we extend our observations still farther, and take a more comprehensive view of human nature, influenced and modified by political and religious systems, intellectual theories, and social habits, although we see Christianity daily acquiring a greater extension, by reason of the vast empire of the Spaniards, and the increasing power of the North American republic beyond the Atlantic, as also by the aggrandisement of the Russian empire, which now extends over all the northern regions of Asia, as well as by the colonies and missionaries of Great Britain, and other European nations; yet we see the greatest part of Asia, and almost the whole of Africa, under the power of despotism and the influence of superstition. All the northern parts of Africa, with Egypt, Arabia, the Turkish dominions, Persia, a great part of India and Tartary are in the profession of the Mahometan religion, while a still greater part of the Indians and Tartars adhere to those of the Bramins, and of the Lama of Thibet. The inhabitants of the vast and populous countries of China, Japan, Ton-

China, and Cochin China, adhere to the various systems of Foe or Confucius, or else to that of Mahomet; and each of the systems, established in these oriental nations, branches out into a number of subdivisions. The extensive countries of Siam, Pegu, Ava, &c. situated to the east of the bay of Bengal, have systems of their own equally absurd; and the vast interior and southern parts of Africa, except the empire of Abyssinia, where the religion is composed of a mixture of Judaism and Christianity, and perhaps of some Mahometan superstitions, are immersed in the depths of religious and intellectual barbarism. We know but little of the political and religious systems established in many of the countries just mentioned. They are seldom visited by intelligent travellers, and history affords us no information relative to the origin or formation of their different religious or political institutions. We know, however, enough to see, that after such a long succession of ages, mankind emerge but slowly from barbarism and ignorance; and that the illuminating radiance of Christianity, as yet, shines only on a small part of the human race.

Among the numerous historical and moral questions which might be propounded, and which it is impossible to solve, the reason might be demanded why there exists such a difference in the intellectual improvements of different nations, and why the arts and sciences, literature and civilization, have made so great a progress

in some countries, while others have scarcely yet emerged from their primeval ignorance. The most remarkable links of that great chain of causes and effects, which has produced this distinction among the nations, ancient and modern, with whose history we have any acquaintance, are tolerably conspicuous. The circumstances which caused the rise, the progress, and the decline of the arts and sciences, and literary knowledge, in Babylon and Egypt, as well as among the Greek and Romans, and since among the modern Europeans, are sufficiently distinguishable among the crowd of moral occurrences which fill the pages of history, and by the effects they have produced, diversify, with innumerable shades, the ever varying picture of human existence. Of the history of many other nations, however, we are totally ignorant; but some of them do not appear to have ever made any advancement beyond the arts of necessity; in some we perceive a regard to conveniency, and in others a certain degree even of luxury, but with a very small progress in intellectual improvement. Some nations, as the Hindoos and the Chinese, appear to have made considerable advances in scientific and literary knowledge, and in the arts and embellishments of civilized life, at a very early period. It is beyond a doubt, that those oriental nations had made no inconsiderable advancement in those things before almost any marks of civilization were discoverable among the most polite of the modern nations of

Europe, and in all probability before the Romans, or the Greek themselves, had made any great progress in knowledge; yet neither scientific nor literary improvements were ever carried to such a pitch among the Eastern nations as among the Greeks, the Romans, and the modern Europeans;—but, on the contrary, seems to have long remained stationary in those countries. The decline of the Hindoo learning, in the latter ages, may readily be accounted for, by the circumstance of the subversion of their political power and importance, and their subjection to the yoke of the Tartar invaders, who established the Mahometan religion, and the Mogul empire in India, and rendered that celebrated country for many ages a theatre of revolutions and of crimes. But it is difficult to find a satisfactory reason, why the Chinese, after having, at a very early period, made greater progress in science and literature than most, if not any of the western nations, should, as it were, have stopped at a fixed point of improvement, without advancing any farther during a period of many centuries. It is somewhat difficult to account for this phenomenon; perhaps, if we were better acquainted with the ancient and modern history of that celebrated people, the difficulty might either vanish, or be considerably lessened; and this remarkable circumstance in the history of the human mind be ascribed to its true cause. The Chinese, according to the histories of that nation, trans-

mitted to us by their own writers, have been less exposed to foreign invasion, less harassed by external wars, and less agitated by internal commotions, than almost any other nation; and scarcely any great empire has, during so long a period of political existence, undergone so few revolutions; for the Tartar conquest, one of the greatest and most important revolutions which ever happened in China, was no more than a transfer of the sovereignty from one family to another, and made little or no alteration in the national institutions, and the genius of the people, as the Tartars adopted the manners of the Chinese, in every particular, even to their dress, instead of compelling them to conform to the customs and usages of the conquerors; in which, circumstances considered, the Tartars displayed a masterpiece of sound sense and good policy.

This view of the Chinese history, delineated from the accounts of their own writers, appears on considering the local circumstances of that country, a pretty just representation. China, at an early period, replenished with inhabitants, and organized in a regular political system, was far the most populous and most powerful empire in the eastern parts of Asia. Separated by immense deserts from the western countries, it had seldom any attack to apprehend from that quarter. The nations to the south, or south-west, were far inferior in strength, and for the most part under the power, or at least the influence, of the Chinese empire. On the east the

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sea was its barrier, and consequently the northern frontier was the only vulnerable part on which China apprehended and actually experienced an invasion from foreign enemies. This frontier they fortified with that celebrated wall, which has been so much talked of, and which, although it exists a remarkable monument of the industry of the Chinese nation, was not found sufficient to resist the assaults of the Tartars, the only enemy which that empire ever had to fear. The invasion and conquest of that country, by the successors of Zingis Khan, was, however, of a desultory nature, and does not appear to have produced any very considerable revolution in the genius, manners, and general state of the people; and the last Tartar conquest, as already observed, was productive of as little alteration in this respect. In such a state of local security and political stability; joined to the advantages of a fertile soil and happy climate, it is somewhat wonderful, that the Chinese, after having at so early a period displayed the activity of the national genius, by as great a progress in arts, science, and philosophy, as any of the nations of antiquity, without exception, should have so soon arrived at the *ne plus ultra* of their intellectual and scientific attainments, and have remained to this day, in that respect, in the very same state in which they were many centuries ago. It is impossible, with the imperfect knowledge which the Europeans have of the Chinese, and their history, to assign

with any degree of certainty the true cause of this singular circumstance. If we should hazard a conjecture, it seems hardly possible to attribute it to any thing else than a slavish attachment to established systems, customs, and current opinions, which extinguishes the spirit of enquiry and improvement in both religion and philosophy, and in every department of human science; and of which the effects are discoverable at one period or another in the history of almost every people. Whether the Creator and Supreme Disposer of all, who, in filling up the immensity of his plan, peopled the earth with various orders of beings, from man down to the lowest insect, has, in his infinite wisdom, thought proper to distinguish different nations and races of men by a different measure of intellectual powers; we, who see human nature modified and influenced by a thousand external and adventitious circumstances, are not competent to determine. It is almost equally difficult to conceive in what degree physical circumstances may operate on the mental faculties of the inhabitants of different climates. If we contemplate and compare the ancient and present state of Italy, and Greece, as well as of all the nations of modern Europe, and make just reflections of the decline of Grecian literature, and Roman valour, as well as on the extraordinary advancement of the formerly barbarous nations of Europe, in every species of intellectual improvement, it will appear that the faculties of

the human mind, are much more strongly influenced, and its progress in knowledge more decidedly determined by moral than physical circumstances. In regard to bodily strength and constitution, physical causes may probably have a more powerful influence. The inhabitants of the southerly climates are generally described as inferior in strength and courage to those of the more northern countries; but notwithstanding this general representation, a number of exceptions must be admitted. Perhaps the generality of the case may be called in question; and it is far from being certain, that the people of Africa, and some of the southern parts of Asia, are inferior in bodily strength to the Europeans and northern Asiatics. It is, however, certain, that warm climates relax the springs of action, and render the inhabitants less inclined to vigorous exertions of either body or mind. The wealth and abundance generally furnished by the luxuriant soil and genial climate of the southern regions, are often supposed to have given the natives a taste for luxury, but this is certainly an erroneous hypothesis. The nations of the south do not live more but less luxuriously than those of the north; their luxury, however, is of a different cast, and more tinctured with effeminacy and indolence. This is imagined to be the true reason why the southern nations have so often been conquered by those of the north. It may indeed be remarked, that the greatest and most remarkable migrations of the human race have

been made from the northern towards the southern regions, and that the latter have commonly fallen a prey to the northern conquerors; whereas the people of warmer climates have never, in any one instance, extended their conquests very far to the north. Neither the Babylonians, the Persians, nor the Saracens, the most southerly of any of the great conquering nations mentioned in history, ever proceeded far to the northward; but it must also be considered, that they had no inducement to carry their arms that way. The northern nations had many and strong inducements to migrate and seek for conquest and riches in the pleasant, fertile and wealthy countries of the south: but the people of those countries could have no temptation to allure them into the impervious wildernesses and morasses of the northern regions: and this may probably be one reason why the northern nations were never conquered by those of the south, and which may have operated as powerfully in that respect as the supposed inferiority of strength and courage, and other martial qualifications, in the people of the southern climates.

If we could clearly see all the different combination of circumstances which have, through a succession of ages, diversified and determined the condition of nations, we should, perhaps, find that a train of moral causes, forming themselves into an infinity of combinations, and operating with an infinite variety of influences, has determined the degree of intellectual perfection

to which they can reach, as well as the place they must hold in the political scale, and that no essential physical difference between the different nations, into which the human species is divided, exists; but that all seeming distinction of that kind, all apparent intellectual pre-eminence or inferiority, depend upon a combination of causes, under the direction of that Providence which has marked out the course of human affairs, and set both to nations and individuals the bounds, which they cannot pass.

In taking a retrospective view of the long revolution of ages, filled by the successive generations of mankind, and contemplating the varied scene of human existence, the mind is astonished at the wonderful exhibition, and cannot refrain from making serious reflections on the transitory state of all sublunary things. When we contemplate the subversion of empires, the fall of conquerors, the extinction of their families, and the inefficacy of all their projects and performances, we perceive the short-lived nature of all the objects of human ambition. The kings, the heroes, and conquerors of antiquity, are no more; their very bones are long ago reduced to dust, and their names which are all that is left of them in this world are only an empty sound. Their posterity is either long since extinct, or their descendants are mixed with the great mass of the vulgar, undistinguished and unknown. Many lineal descendants of the most celebrated personages

of antiquity are among the number of poor labourers and mechanics of the present day ; and while their progenitors bore rule over mankind, the ancestors of the princes, the philosophers and literati of the modern world, were leading a wandering and savage life in the immense wildernesses of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Poland, and Germany ; countries which were all in a state of barbarism, while Greece and Rome were flourishing in arts and sciences, and in the meridian of their glory. So completely has all human power been overturned, that one of the most celebrated writers of the last century, says, that not one family can be found, either in Rome, or any other part of Italy, which can with certainty trace its genealogy from the ancient Romans. Such are the vicissitudes of this ever changing scene, exhibited on the moral theatre of the world.

The philosopher, who takes a retrospective view of the history of mankind, and contemplates, with a spirit of observation and reflection, the complicated and interesting drama of human existence, throughout all its successive and variegated scenes, from the earliest period of historical record to the present day, will, perhaps, find no difficulty in perceiving that imperious circumstances fix the destiny of nations and of individuals ; that various combinations of physical and moral causes, incalculably numerous, and extremely complex, determine the political, religious, intellectual, and social

condition of mankind ; that all things are directed to the accomplishment of one vast and mysterious plan ; and that the history of human affairs, and the history of Divine Providence, are essentially the same.

These observations and reflections, on the history of our species, are offered to your consideration by an affectionate friend, at your own request ; and you will undoubtedly make this further reflection on the vicissitudes of sublunary things, that however exalted the station of any individual may be, or however extensive and conspicuous his sphere of action, its duration is extremely short ; and that the revolution of a few years puts an end to all artificial distinctions, and places the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the victor and the vanquished, on the same level. And you will be ready to make this conclusion, that, as in a dramatic representation, it is of little consequence to the actors which of them appears in the character of the prince, or which in that of the peasant, since all are equal as soon as the play is ended ; so it is an affair of trifling importance what part we are destined to perform in the drama of human life ; the great point of consequence to us is, how our respective parts are acted.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

THE END.
